Draft Community Engagement Policy 2021

Maroondah City Council

2040 MAROONDAH

Working towards a well governed and empowered community

Contents

Contents

What is the purpose of this policy? 4

Our engagement objectives: 4

Policy Scope 4

What is community engagement? 5

Our commitment to the community 7

Types of community engagement 8

Why we engage... 9

Who we engage 10

When we engage 11

How we engage 13

Supporting information 15

What is the purpose of this policy?

The Community Engagement Policy is a formal expression of Council's commitment to engaging with our community and understanding the different views, experiences and expertise our community has to offer. Our community and stakeholders play a vital role in shaping the City of Maroondah and we consider community engagement to be an essential component of good governance and leadership.

Council is committed to engaging effectively with its community in a meaningful, accountable, responsive and equitable way. This policy outlines Council's position, role and commitments to ensure community engagement is integrated into Council activities. This policy is supported by a comprehensive Community Engagement Toolkit designed to guide Council officers in the effective planning, implementation and evaluation of community engagement activities.

Our engagement principles

Council's approach to community and stakeholder engagement is guided by the community engagement principles set out under Section 56 of the *Local Government Act 2020* and includes:

- 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 diverse and 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.

Policy Scope

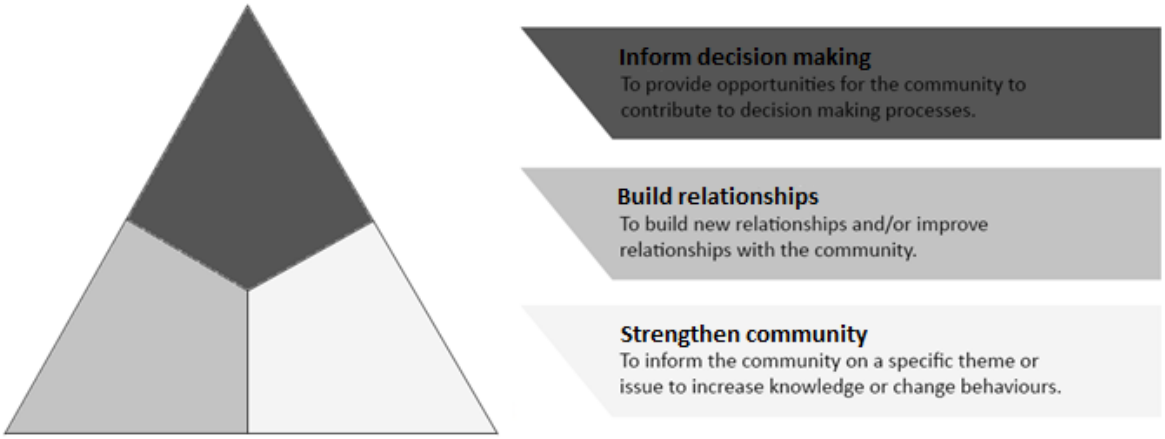
The Community Engagement Policy applies to all community engagement activities as directed by Council, recommended by Council officers, or legislated by the *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*. Community engagement is the responsibility of Councillors, all Council service areas, teams and employees and also applies to contractors and consultants undertaking work on behalf of Council.

Applying the policy should start at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered; when an issue is raised and requires a decision; or when more information or evidence is required. Engagement may be required at multiple stages within a project, program or development.

The policy does not apply to community engagement processes that are subject to prescribed processes such as the Victorian Government land-use planning applications or other Council processes such as service requests or complaints.

What is community engagement?

Community engagement is a planned process that provides a range of opportunities for public involvement in Council's decision making, relationship building and community strengthening. Effective community engagement enables Council to make well-informed decisions at an operational and strategic level and creates a better level of understanding between Council and our community. Community engagement is achieved when the community is and feels part of a process.

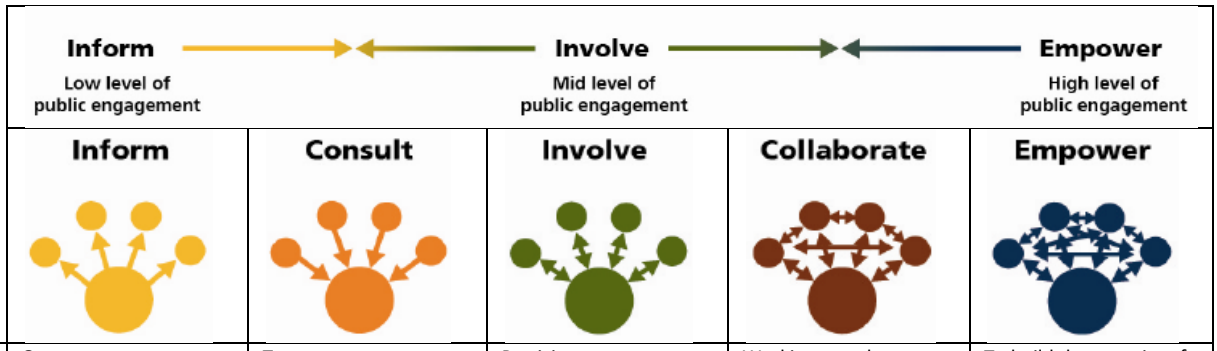


Understanding the levels of engagement

This Community Engagement Policy adopts the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2) *Public Participation Spectrum* which underpins Council's planning, implementation and evaluation of its community engagement practices.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum demonstrates the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities across five levels.

The public participation spectrum (table overleaf) identifies each of these five levels of engagement and clearly outlines the amount of involvement from both the Council and stakeholders/community within each level.



Goal	One-way communication to provide balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has already happened.	Two-way communication process aimed at obtaining feedback on ideas, alternatives and proposals to inform our decision making.	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered.	Working together to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred collective solutions.	To build the capacity of the community to lead their own plans for change.
Role of community and/or stakeholders	Listen	Contribute	Participate	Partner	Lead
Engagement Type	Consultative		Deliberative		
Examples when this engagement level may be appropriate	• E.g. In the event of an emergency • Undertaking a playground redevelopment		• Seeking input from Advisory Committees on key initiatives, strategies and plans • Facilitated discussions on developing community vision key directions • Development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan		
Possible methods	• Advertisements • Fact sheets • Newsletter • Public Notices • Social media • Websites	• Focus groups • Public exhibition • Surveys	• Workshops • Advisory committees	• Consensus building • Facilitated workshops	• Community Panel • Deliberative workshops • Deliberative Focus Groups

Our commitment to the community

Council's Community Engagement Policy is built upon a set of commitments that guide the planning, development, implementation, evaluation and continuous improvement of community engagement processes undertaken by Council.

These commitments are built upon the core values identified by the International Association for Public Participation[1] and will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Privacy Policy.[2]

When engaging the community, we will be open and accountable in our decision-making process. Council commits that:

1. We will ensure that the purpose of our engagement is clear, relevant and the methods used are well suited to generate highly effective community engagement.
2. We will provide information that is clear, easy to understand and accessible to all people.
3. We will proactively engage with our community in an ethical manner using a range of methods and enable everyone to have a voice on matters of importance to them. We will provide engagement opportunities that are mutually respectful, undertaken in reasonable timeframes and with a shared understanding of how the input will inform decision making processes.
4. We will value all participants' knowledge, expertise and experiences, acknowledging that everyone has different views and needs.
5. We will undertake evaluation processes to continually improve our approach to community engagement.
6. We will report back to our community in a timely manner about how their input was considered and influenced the final outcome.
7. We will use information provided by community engagement to advocate on behalf of our community to relevant parties.

[1] The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organisation advancing the practice of public participation.
[2] See 'Supporting Information' section for more details on Council's Privacy Policy

Types of community engagement

Council undertakes a range of community engagement activities which can be broadly defined as consultative or participatory engagement practice. Engagement can occur at multiple stages throughout a process and often includes both types of engagement providing community and stakeholders with opportunity to participate at different levels throughout the process.

Consultative engagement

Consultative engagement occurs when views, opinions or ideas are invited on a particular project, draft policy, plan or document. Participation at this level can encompass a broad range of community members and stakeholders. Examples of consultative engagement can include:

- Surveys
- Polls
- Ideas boards

Deliberative engagement

Deliberative engagement is an approach which encourages community members to critically test, weigh up and consider a range of information, perspectives, inputs and evidence to reach a consensus or make recommendations. Deliberation can be scaled to suit a project based on its scope, complexity or impact and may require independent facilitation to ensure a fair and equitable process.

Section 55 (2(g)) in the Act 2020 specifies that a Community Engagement Policy is required to give effect to deliberative engagement practices capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan.

Submission process

The submission process generally applies to legislative requirements such as the Victorian Government land-use planning applications or Council processes such as service requests or complaints. This policy does not apply to the community engagement processes prescribed for these functions.

Statutory requirements

Under the *Local Government Act 2020* Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long -term community vision, financial plan and asset plan, as well as a four-year Council Plan. In addition, Council has a statutory requirement to develop a four-year Municipal Health Plan as prescribed in the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

Council will ensure the community is invited to participate in the development of its strategic plans and that engagement opportunities give effect to the principles listed in this Community Engagement Policy.

Why we engage...

Community engagement is a collaborative process that connects Council with the community in a mutually beneficial sharing of new ideas, skills, knowledge, expertise and experience.

Effective and meaningful community engagement has real benefits for both Council and the community. Better identifying the priorities, needs and aspirations of our community will assist Council to improve its strategic planning and service delivery. A regular two-way conversation ensures Council is transparent, accountable and informed in its decision making which will demonstrate integrity, build trust, develop strong partnerships and create sustainable outcomes.

Where appropriate, engagement should go above and beyond legislative requirements. The information and knowledge gained through hearing a range of community perspectives assists Council to make informed decisions; develop strong partnerships and create sustainable outcomes.

The community also benefit from participating in engagement activities. Participating in engagement can create a sense of belonging and connection; increase community involvement; unite and empower individuals and communities; and lead to a greater community ownership and resilience.

The knowledge, expertise and experience gained also provides Council with a foundation to advocate to other relevant parties, including Federal and State Government bodies, on issues of community importance which are out of its direct control.

In summary, there are a broad range of benefits to effective and authentic community engagement, both to Council and the community.

Other benefits include:

- better understand the needs and priorities of our diverse community and stakeholders
- fostering strong relationships and partnerships with our community
- meeting legislative requirements
- providing a valuable source of evidence-based information which gives a wider perspective on issues and supports Council's future planning and service delivery activities
- supporting transparency and accountability, integrity is demonstrated, and trust built between all parties
- ensuring the community's right to assist with democratic processes
- ensuring informed decision making occurs and issues are addressed
- helping to inform and assist with advocacy
- leading to more sustainable outcomes
- building community resilience and capacity leading to community empowerment.

Who we engage

Maroondah is a diverse community with a mix of people from all walks of life, who all have unique experiences, interests and expertise. Our engagement process will identify community and stakeholders who are impacted by or interested in a project or Council decision.

For the purpose of this policy:

- the Maroondah community is defined as individuals or groups who live, work, play, visit, study, invest in or pass through Maroondah. They could share a geographical location; characteristic or interest.
- the term 'stakeholder' defines our community groups or individuals who are directly impacted by, involved with, or interested in, Council's decision making, relationship building or community strengthening processes.

Each person within our community has the potential to be a stakeholder in Council's engagement activities.

In Maroondah, some of the stakeholder groups include:

- Arts and culture community
- Business and industry
- Carers
- Chamber of commerce
- Children
- Community service providers
- Commuters
- Emergency services
- Environmental groups
- Families
- Government departments
- Heritage groups
- Indigenous community
- Lesbian. gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community
- Local, State and Federal MPs
- Maroondah City Council employees
- Mayor and Councillors
- Media
- Neighbouring Councils or other local government organisations
- Not for profit organisations and groups
- People experiencing homelessness
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People with a disability
- Public transport user groups
- Ratepayers
- Residents
- Schools, education facilities and students
- Seniors/senior groups
- Service groups
- Sporting, leisure and recreational clubs and groups
- Students
- Visitors to Maroondah
- Volunteers/ volunteer organisations
- Young people

When we engage

Good governance is based on a belief that those impacted by a decision may have important contributions to make in a decision-making process. In planning a community engagement process, Council will determine at which levels we will engage and what corresponding commitment we will make to stakeholders and/or the community. This decision will guide the nature and methods of engagement.

Community engagement should take place at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered, when an issue is raised and requires a decision or when more information or evidence is required.

The type of engagement undertaken by Council will be determined based on the scope, complexity or impact of the project or decision being made. Engagement should take place at the planning stage of any project or initiative, when a change in service, activities or infrastructure is considered, when an issue is raised and requires a decision or when more information or evidence is required. Engagement is likely to be undertaken at multiple stages within a project, program or development.

Circumstances that trigger engagement

Council will promote opportunities for the community to actively participate in the following processes:

- where a proposed change to Council activities or strategic direction may significantly affect the community in terms of the economy, lifestyle, environment, wellbeing or amenity of the municipality
- when developing new or reviewing existing policies, strategies or plans
- introducing a new service, discontinuing an existing service or substantially changing or reviewing a service that may significantly affect how services are provided
- proposals for changing the way in which public space looks, is used or enjoyed
- the community raises an issue with Council for a decision (or outcome) and there are likely to be competing community interests
- planning and development of major projects and capital works, including public buildings, centres or other infrastructure
- urban development/redevelopment proposals, such as structure plans, that may significantly alter the existing amenity or characteristics of a geographic area.
- any circumstance where Council needs more information or evidence to make an informed decision.

Mandatory engagement

Council is required to undertake community engagement under a range of prescribed regulations and legislation, including the engagement requirements set out under the *Local Government Act 2020* as well as a broad range of other relevant Acts. (Refer to page 18 Statutory Requirements).

Engagement will be undertaken to ensure we meet our statutory obligations and in many instances, Council will go above and beyond the minimum requirements to gain a strong understanding of our community's wants and needs to ensure we are achieving the best possible outcomes for our community.

Circumstances where Council's engagement with the community will be limited

There are times when Council's level of engagement with the community and key stakeholders will be limited. In certain circumstances, Council may only be able to inform the community and stakeholders of Council's decisions and actions.

Examples include when:

- Council is not the lead agency
- an immediate resolution is required
- specialist or technical expertise is required
- an initiative involves confidential or commercial information
- there are clear and defined legislative responsibilities that must be met
- developing or reviewing internal policies and procedures
- there is a risk to public safety.

How we engage

There is no one-size fits all approach to community engagement activities. A variety of methods will be required to cater for the different purposes of engagement as well as the broad range of groups and individuals in the community.

The planning stage for all engagement activities is critical to ensuring successful and authentic engagement with our community and key stakeholders. The engagement process should be tailored to each project or decision being made based on the levels of complexity or public impact/interest.

A Community Engagement Toolkit has been prepared for Council officers to support them in developing and implementing effective engagement processes.

Key steps in our community engagement planning:

P L A N	Define the engagement purpose, objectives and scope	Understanding the purpose and the objectives of the engagement is a critical first step in the planning process. Here we determine the reasons why we are engaging and what we are trying to achieve. Careful consideration is also given to: • the level of engagement required (IAP2 Spectrum) • what the community can influence (negotiables and non-negotiables) • how the results will be used (engagement outcomes) • when the engagement is required (timeframes) • how will the engagement process be monitored and evaluated (Evaluation)
	Understand the level of Impact Interest	Community and stakeholder's analysis are undertaken to ensure engagement is representative and inclusive of those who are impacted/interested in the project or decision. Consideration is given to: • barriers to participation and how these can be addressed and overcome • reasonable support is provided to participants to enable meaningful and informed engagement • participants are entitled to feel valued, respected and welcome, regardless of gender, age, ability, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation.
	Design appropriate communication and engagement methods	The communication and engagement methods used to facilitate participation are fit for purpose based on participants' needs and the information being conveyed. The timeframes for the engagement activities allow participants to understand and consider the information provided and make a fully informed contribution. A variety of engagement methods can be used throughout the engagement process

D O	Implement the engagement	Conduct engagement activities that are meaningful, genuine and respectful. Invite previously identified stakeholders to participate and ensure participation is accessible and inclusive.
	Provide clear, timely communications	Provide clear, jargon-free information to participants to explain the initiative and consider translated information if required. Allow sufficient time to review the information and provide feedback.
S H A R E	Closing the loop with the community	Following the engagement process we will report back to the community and stakeholders the results and outcomes of the engagement process. This will be done in a timely, accessible and informative manner so that participants understand how their involvement influenced the process, and therefore the outcome or decision. If the engagement process is lengthy it is important that regular project updates are provided to ensure the community remain engaged.
	inform the decision-making process	After the consultation process is complete and all feedback has been collated and reviewed, a report is prepared for Council that articulates the consultation methodology and outcomes and how it informs the project or decision being made.
E V A L U A T E	Measuring outcomes	Evaluation of the engagement process is planned at the beginning of the project, so we are aware of what the outcome will be measured against. The evaluation process will be tailored to the scale and complexity of the engagement and will consider a number of elements including: • the engagement objectives were met • engagement outcomes were achieved • participants were representative of the stakeholders identified based on impact/interest • the communications and engagement methods were appropriate
	Sharing evaluation outcomes	Reflective practice allows us to refine and continually improve our community engagement practices. We will reflect on what did and didn't work objectively and realistically and produce an evaluation report to share observations and recommendations.
I M P R O V E	Continuous improvement and capacity building of Council officers	We will take the lessons learnt throughout the project capturing them in an accessible format. Ideas for improvement of engagement will be shared across the organisation and inform future versions of this Policy and Council's broader engagement framework.

Supporting information

Definitions

Accessibility

the opportunity for all people to engage with activities in a manner that is equal and dignifying.

Advocacy

Public support for or recommendation of a particular cause or policy.

Community

Includes individuals or groups who live, work, play, study, visit, invest in or pass through the municipality.

Community consultation

This is a form of community engagement that relates to the tools and practices used by Council to enable public involvement in decisions and actions that shape the community.

Community strengthening

Community strengthening refers to a sustained effort of building cohesive and inclusive communities. This process aims to increase the connectedness, active engagement and partnership among members of the community, community groups and organisations in order to enhance social, economic and environmental wellbeing.

Deliberation

Long and careful consideration or discussion.

Ethical

Adherence to moral principles and conduct in undertaking a process or activity.

IAP2

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organisation advancing the practice of public participation. IAP2 supports people who implement or participate in public decision-making processes.

Plan

A plan outlines a detailed future course of action for Council aimed at achieving specific goals or objectives within a specific timeframe. A plan should identify roles and responsibilities along with resources that are required.

Policy

A policy sets out Council's views with respect to a particular matter. It includes a set of principles or rules that provide a definite direction for the organisation.

Responsible governance

Effective processes for making and implementing decisions.

Strategy

A strategy provides high level holistic directions for Council designed to bring about a desired future, such as achievement of one or more goals or outcomes.

IAP2 Core Values

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an international organisation advancing the practice of public participation. The IAP2 framework is underpinned by seven core values that are aimed at ensuring organisations make better decisions which reflect the interests and concerns of potentially affected people and entities. These values are:

1. Public participation is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process.
2. Public participation includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision.
3. Public participation promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers.
4. Public participation seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision.
5. Public participation seeks input from participants in designing how they participate.
6. Public participation provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way.
7. Public participation communicates to participants how their input affected.

Roles and responsibilities

The design, delivery, reporting and evaluation of community engagement is the responsibility of employees as appropriate to their role and function.

The application of principles and processes outlined in this policy is effectively the responsibility of line management across the breadth of Council service areas and teams. Councillors are responsible for adopting the *Community Engagement Policy* and for championing our commitment to community engagement in their interactions with the Maroondah community. It is also a requirement of the *Local Government Act 2020* that the role of the Mayor is to lead engagement with the community on the development of the Council Plan (s 18c).

Related legislation

Council is required to meet a variety of legislative obligations such as the *Local Government Act 2020* which identifies principles for when and how we engage with our community and key stakeholders based on their level of impact or interest in a decision being made.

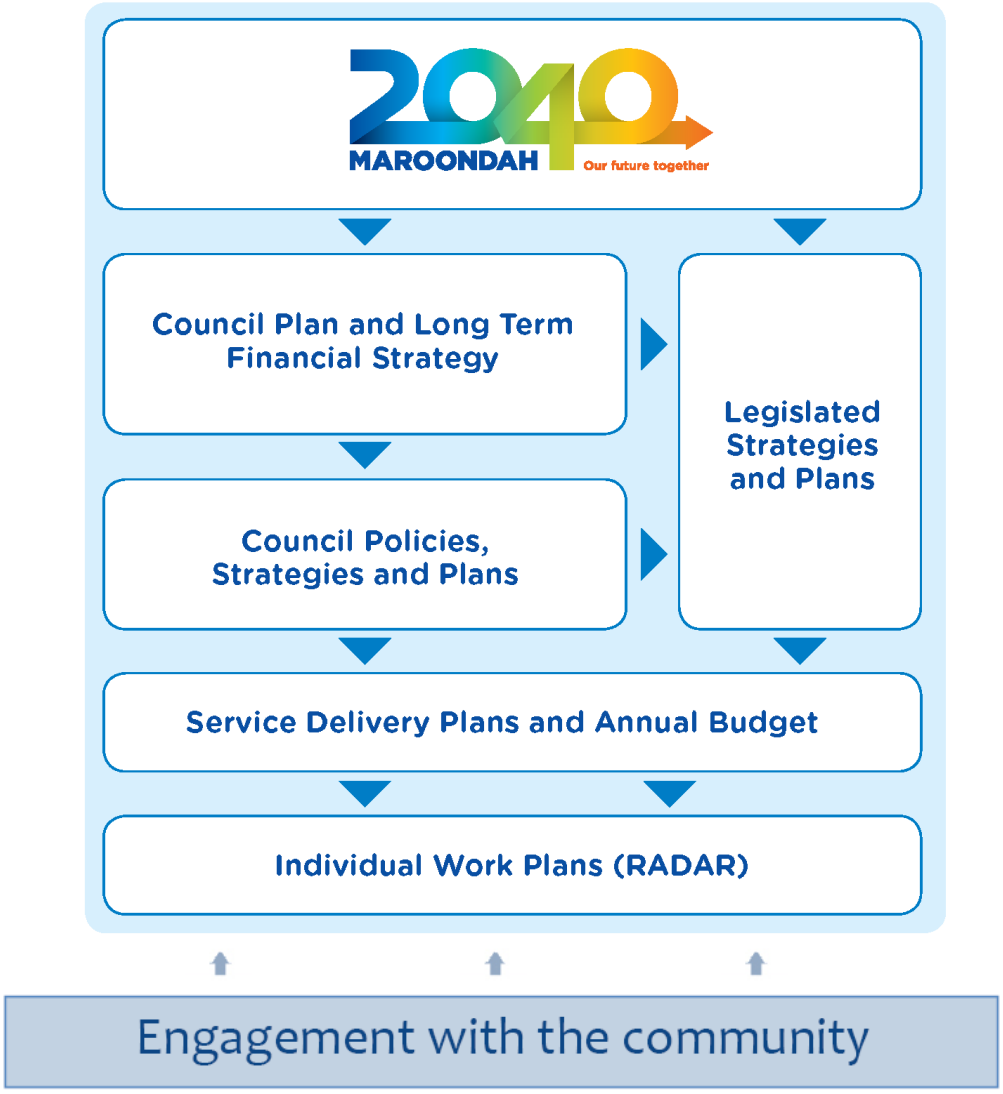
Other relevant legislation includes:

- *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
- *Disability Act 2006*
- *Privacy and Data Protection Act 2004*
- *Planning and Environment Act 1987*
- *Road Management Act 2004*
- *Multicultural Victoria Act 2011*
- *Subordinate Legislation Act 1994*
- *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*
- Matters subject to s.223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*
- *Gender Equality Act 2020*
- *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
- *Public Administration Act 2004*
- *Child Safe Standards*, Victorian Commission for Children and Young People

Related policies, strategies, procedures and guidelines

All of Council's strategic documents are linked to an Integrated Planning Framework. This framework seeks to ensure that all of Council's activities and resources are aligned in order to meet the aspirations, needs and expectations of the Maroondah community.

Community engagement is a core process that underpins this Integrated Planning Framework and ensures that community needs, and aspirations are considered in developing and implementing Council's strategic directions and priorities.



Relationship to the Maroondah 2040 Community Vision

Community engagement processes support the delivery of all outcome areas identified in the *Maroondah 2040 Community Vision*.

In particular, principles and processes of community engagement outlined in this policy are aligned with:

Community Outcome:	A well governed and empowered community
Key Directions:	8.4 Work in partnership to deliver innovative, accessible and evidence informed services that are people focused, proactive, integrated and responsive 8.8 Ensure that all community members have access to, and are informed on, matters that affect them, including the provision of tailored information for under-represented and hard-to-reach groups 8.9 Undertake inclusive engagement and consultation using accessible and tailored approaches to consider the needs and aspirations of different age and population groups 8.10 Create opportunities for shared decision making through active community involvement 8.11 Work in partnership to advocate for and champion the needs and aspirations of the community to other levels of government, service providers and the business sector 8.12 Foster local and regional partnerships with individuals, community groups, businesses, service providers, agencies and all levels of government

Privacy Policy

Council is committed to protecting the personal privacy of residents and ratepayers. To provide services, all Councils are required to collect and use personal, confidential and sensitive information of individuals. Maroondah is required to balance the rights of individuals to have controls over the use of their personal information to that of ensuring that the right information is available for services to operate and function.

Maroondah City Council has adopted a Privacy Policy to regulate the use and access by Council to the personal information and health information that it collects from both its residents and clients. This policy applies to all community engagement activities undertaken by Council.

This policy is available on Council website: http://www.maroondah.vic.gov.au

Public Transparency Policy

The *Public Transparency Policy* formalises Council's commitment to open and transparent decision-making. It describes which Council information is publicly available, and how to access this information. It also explains when Council information may be confidential or when making it available may be contrary to the public interest.

To contact Council

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