

Community Engagement Policy

2021



participate |



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Acknowledgement

Brimbank City Council acknowledges that the land the municipality now occupies has a human history that began with Aboriginal Traditional Custodians, the Kulin Nation. Brimbank City Council respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we operate – the Wurundjeri people, and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Community engagement in Brimbank

Brimbank City Council is committed to genuine and best practice community engagement to enable meaningful and inclusive opportunities for community to be involved and inform decision making processes.

Council will encourage a sustainable model of community engagement that builds local capacity and leadership.

Council is committed to working in close collaboration with the community, drawing on a wide cross-section of contributors through a variety of methods, forums and partnerships across all levels of public participation.

Council is committed to understanding the many different views, experiences and expertise of Brimbank's diverse community. Council is accountable to the promise of accessibility, fairness, honesty and transparency in the practice of engaging with the community.



Purpose and Scope

Brimbank's Community Engagement Policy (the Policy) articulates Council's commitment to undertaking best practice community engagement in order to effectively inform decision making processes. The Policy provides guiding principles and approaches that are key to designing engagement opportunities for authentic community participation. These are in accordance with the *Victorian Local Government Act 2020*, the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO)¹ Public Participation Principles and the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)².

This Policy is Council's overarching community engagement document and it applies to Councillors, Council employees, external consultants employed as representatives of Council who organise and or convene community engagement activities in any form and the Brimbank community.



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- 1 An independent officer of the Victorian Parliament that audits public sector agencies.
 - 2 A global member association which seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community and stakeholder engagement.

Objectives of the Policy

Provide a guide for best practice and effective community engagement opportunities to inform decision making for the benefit of the community.

Describe Council's approach and commitment to community engagement practices.

Provide a framework so that Council policies, strategies and plans will reflect the community's vision, aspirations and priorities.

Provide a framework that enables Council to build community capacity and strengthen relationships.



Definition of terms being used

Community

Refers to City of Brimbank residents or

- People residing in the same geographical area or have a shared background, e.g. Sydenham community or Albion community.
- People with same interests, e.g. business community or sporting community.
- Community of identity, e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, particular age groups and people with vested interest in the municipality.

Community Engagement

Community engagement involves interactions between identified groups of people and involves processes that are linked to problem solving or decision making where community input is used to make better decisions.

Deliberative engagement

A process to decision making in which the community considers relevant facts from various points of view, converse with one another to think critically about options before them and enlarge their perspectives, opinions and understandings and recommend options to the decision makers. In Brimbank, this may include but not limited to community panels, consultative committees, working groups or advisory groups.

Stakeholders

Sections of the community involved in engagement because of impact, interest or responsibility to deliver on an outcome. Can also refer to external organisations, and other levels of government involved in a decision. Always includes internal decision makers and implementers of decision outcomes.

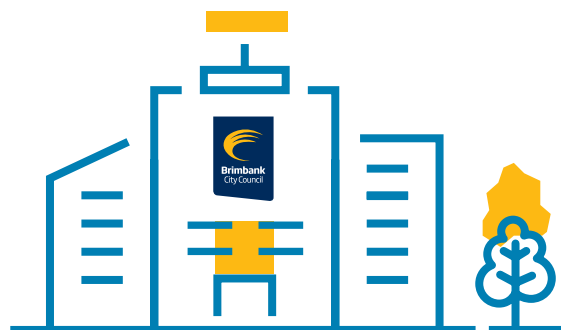
Councillor Portfolio

Internal committees that provide advice to Council, to which a Councillor/s is appointed as a representative. Committees convene to focus on a specific subject.

Roles and Responsibilities

Council

- Endorse and adopt the Policy.
- Support the implementation of this Policy.
- Uphold the Principles of this Policy.
- Promote community participation in engagement activities.
- Consider community engagement results in forming opinions and making decisions.



Council staff

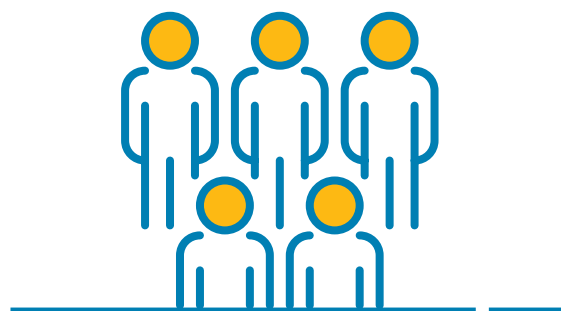
(Executive Management, Managers and Staff involved in community engagement)

- Develop, implement and continually monitor and evaluate the Policy.
- Execute community engagement as transparently and effectively as possible.
- Develop an Engagement toolkit and coach staff in its use and application of evaluation frameworks.
- Ensure cross organisational collaboration to design a genuine and meaningful engagement process.
- Provide relevant information to ensure the community participates meaningfully.
- Document and report engagement findings to Council and the community.



Community Members

- Become informed about how Council makes decisions.
- Review engagement materials.
- Be respectful of others ideas and opinions.
- Adhere to the process and time frames.
- Understand that a number of inputs contribute to inform Council's decision making.



Our Principles

Council's commitment to community engagement is underpinned by six (6) core principles that guide the way it plans and delivers engagement opportunities and activities.

Responsiveness

Council values the insights of our community and respects the time and effort the community gives towards informing our decision making. Therefore, Council will allow sufficient time for review of information and respond to the engagement and input from the community in a timely and constructive manner.



Fairness

Council values the insights of our community and ensures that it makes decisions and provide advice based on merit and without bias, favouritism or self-interest.



Council ensures that community engagement participants are entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement. Support would be unremunerated and may include practical assistance with access and information through such things as transport, child care, information translation and interpretation.

Accountability

Council is committed to being clear about the scope and objectives of the engagement. This will demonstrate that results and outcomes are consistent with the commitment made at the outset of the process.



Transparency and integrity

Council will ensure that those affected by a Council decision understand the scope of the pending decision, the decision-making process and any constraints on this process. Council understands that transparency is key to the engagement process and commits to be clear about the contribution participants are asked to make and the responsibilities associated with this.



Council is committed to sharing the engagement findings and clearly communicating decisions back to the public in a way they understand.

Respect

Council shows respect and makes every reasonable effort to include all of our community while taking into account the needs of the diverse communities to be able to participate meaningfully.



Human Rights

Council promotes human rights and takes into account strategies and legislations that shape the approach to public participation e.g. Brimbank Social Justice Charter, *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.



Our Framework

Brimbank’s community engagement framework details the process Council takes to design the approach and methods to ensure it provides the community with the opportunity to inform decision making. It is a framework that ensures consistency and transparency and holds Council accountable to our community.

Why we engage

Community engagement is much more than just getting feedback on a policy or project. Effective and authentic community engagement:

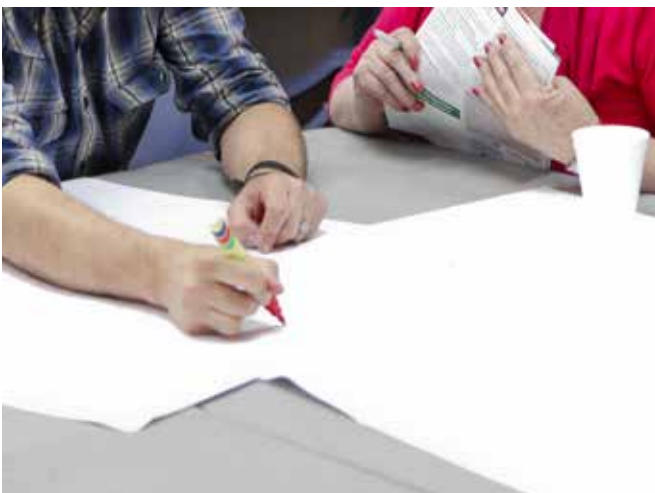
- Leads to better decisions because it provides evidence-based information and gives wider perspectives on issues.
- Builds community ownership, or at the very least, appreciation of the rationale for a particular decision.
- Builds trust with the community through being transparent and responsive to community input.
- Strengthens relationships and partnerships with community which can be used at later stages of the project or for other projects.
- Increases the community’s knowledge and understanding of the issues around the project or policy.

When we engage

Council as a rule engages around major strategies and policies as well as issues concerning local matters. Council will often go beyond the minimum requirements to gain a strong understanding of community perspectives to ensure it is achieving the best possible outcomes for the community.

Statutory requirements

Some elements of community engagement are directed by statutory requirements. The *Local Government Act 2020* requires that a Council must adopt and maintain a Community Engagement Policy. *The Act* further sets out minimum requirements for Council to apply their Community Engagement Policy in the development of the following long term plans: Planning and Financial management, Community Vision, Financial Plan, Revenue and rating planning, Asset Plan and a four year Council Plan. In addition, the Community Engagement Policy will guide the development of other statutory obligations such as the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and the Council’s Local Laws.





Who we engage

With varying degree, some of Councils decisions affect the entire community, but most affect some people more than others. Council is committed to ensuring we capture the views and perspectives that represent our diverse community. We work collaboratively to ensure we reach a diverse range of individuals and groups to achieve this.

Our Community Stakeholders

Seeking a diverse range of views on the plans, strategies and policies of Council is imperative to ensure that community engagement and feedback is representative of the whole community. We understand that some of our stakeholders face barriers to participate in the Council decision making process. We commit to designing and delivering engagement methods that will reach and encourage participation by groups that are diverse for example in age, gender, culture, abilities and socio-economic background. This includes encouraging participation through community groups, sporting groups, faith groups, and cultural groups.

Council notes that in accordance with section 56 of *the Act*, 'Participants in community engagement must be representative of the persons and groups affected by the matter that is the subject of the community engagement'. Where possible and relevant, Council seeks to recruit members of the community to Working Groups or committees with 'lived experience' of the issue, plan or policy under consultation. As part of community engagement, Council may also seek input directly from a range of the existing community based organisations, clubs and groups in Brimbank.



Council may choose to seek feedback from:

- 1. Committees, advisory groups or reference groups.** These may be linked to certain Council assets or Councillor Portfolios and have their own terms of reference. These Committees are reviewed at the start of each Council term. Examples of committees may include, Social Justice Coalition, Lead West Ltd Board, Sunshine Town Centre Partnership Group, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reconciliation Action Plan Consultative Committee, Disability Advisory Committee, Brimbank Youth Council, Arts Advisory Committee, Heritage Advisory Committee, Municipal Emergency Management Plan Committee and Metropolitan Transport Forum.
- 2. Working groups run through a Councillor Portfolio.** These Working Groups are intended to have a limited scope to consider a particular plan, strategy, and policy or Council decision and will be operable for a limited time. It is the hope of Council that as it practices this form of engagement, it can increase diversity of voices from community members who would not otherwise have the time to participate in long-term advisory committees.

Council may also be invited to participate on external committees convened by other organisations, to which it appoints a Councillor/s as Council's delegate. This fosters a deeper understanding of issues, expertise, and community perspective that support the decision making processes.

Along with the community stakeholders, Council is committed to working with other service providers, funding bodies and agencies that are external to Council that provide a deep understanding of broad issues and parameters that surround a decision. Examples of these stakeholders include Federal and State government, Public Transport Victoria, Vic Roads and Melbourne Water.

Understanding our community

Understanding our community is key to designing engagement practices that provide greater opportunities for our residents to participate. It is important to understand factors that may contribute to the way our community gets involved. Council is aware of and respects the community's diversity in age, gender, abilities and socio-economic background, as well as perspectives from our young and vulnerable cohorts.

This Policy is framed by the understanding that Brimbank has developed into one of the most culturally diverse municipalities in Australia.⁴ With over 160 languages spoken in Brimbank, 45 per cent of residents were born overseas, and 58 per cent speak languages other than English.⁵ Compared to Greater Melbourne, over double (13.4 per cent) the number of Brimbank residents do not speak English well or at all. The Brimbank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is 0.4% of the total population compared with 0.7% of the total Victorian population.⁶

Council understands that Brimbank is home to a diverse range of families and households. Families with children continue to be the most significant household type. However, there have been increases in the proportion of lone person households and we do have the highest rates of homelessness across Melbourne's West.⁷ Adults are almost twice as likely not to have attended formal schooling, compared to the Victorian average, and nearly 20 per cent of the population aged 15 year and over have completed year 9 as their highest level of schooling.⁸ Over 35,000 local residents are aged over 65 years of age.⁹

4 ABS 2016 Census, Brimbank Quick Stats

5 Brimbank Resilience Framework 2018

6 ABS 2016 Census, Brimbank Quick Stats

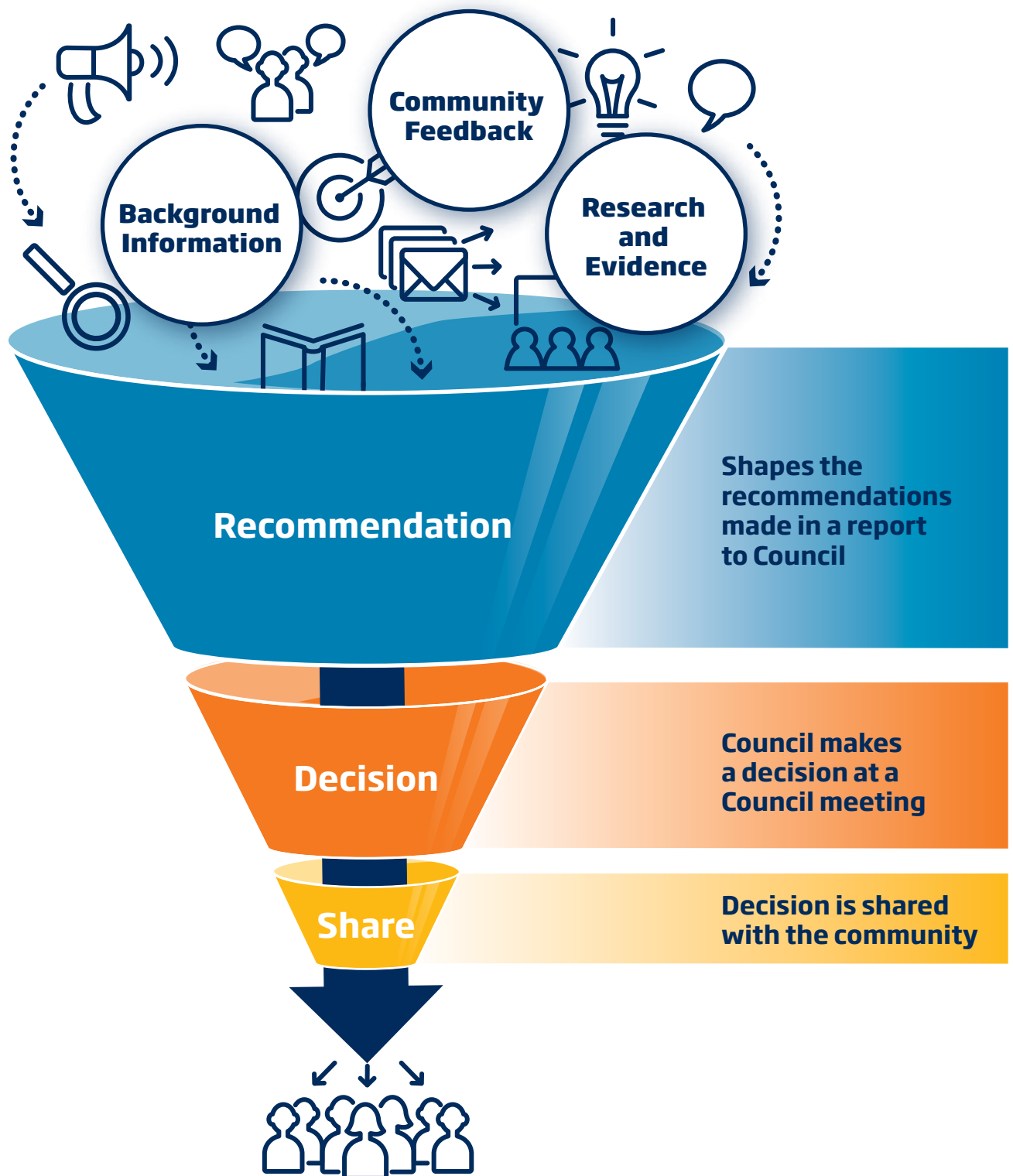
7 Brimbank Council Plans on tackling homelessness, Media Release, June 2020

8 Brimbank Life Long Learning Strategy 2018

9 ABS 2016 Census, Brimbank Quick Stats



Understanding the decision making process



How We Engage

Council will call for different levels of engagement based on significance, complexity and anticipated level of impact on what is being proposed and the stakeholders to be targeted. Care will be taken to adhere to the engagement principles, set clear engagement objectives and consider statutory processes, community interest, opportunities for co-designing engagement projects, political sensitivity, time, resources and budget constraints.

This Policy adopts the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation to guide the range and extent of participation at each of the five levels during the project planning stage.

IAP2 Engagement Spectrum					
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public participation goal	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities and or/solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/ or decision	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that the concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place the final decision making in the hands of the public
Commitment to community	We will keep the community informed	We will keep the community informed, listen to issues & provide feedback as to how input will affect the decision	We will ensure aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives and provide feedback as to how input will affect the decision	We will look to the community for advice and incorporate this advice into the alternatives	We will implement what you decide
Examples of tools and techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media & Communication tools: Promotional Posters, media releases etc. • Fact Sheets • Newsletter • Door Knocking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Say Brimbank website • Public meetings • Surveys • Public comment • Listening Post • Open House 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Say Brimbank website • Workshops • Focus groups • Forums • Planning Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Say Brimbank website • Advisory Committees • Deliberative polling • Consensus building • Community Panels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your Say Brimbank website • Citizens' Jury • Ballots
Brimbank's approach	Participatory engagement		Deliberative engagement		

Types of Community Engagement

The type of community engagement practices undertaken can be broadly described as either participatory or deliberative. Most of Council's community engagement projects are likely to include both practices at various levels.



A. Participatory Engagement

Participatory practices take place at the first two levels of influence on the spectrum, 'Inform' and 'Consult' and involve one-way information exchange either from Council to community or community to Council. Participatory engagement typically occurs when feedback is invited on ideas, alternatives or draft documents. Examples of participatory engagement practices may include surveys, listening posts, polls, ideas gathering, making a Local law, acquiring or selling land and submissions.

Submission process

Submissions will continue to apply as formerly governed by Section 223 of the *Local Government Act 1989*, for provisions such as the 2020 annual budget process, development of Local Laws up until 1 July 2021, after this the *Local Government Act 2020* will apply or where other pieces of legislation require a Section 223 process to be undertaken, until those provisions are replaced with the new provisions in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

B. Deliberative Engagement

Deliberative practices take place at the highest three levels of influence on the IAP2 Spectrum; 'Involve', 'Collaborate' or 'Empower'. Deliberative engagement allows for discussions and the possibility of consensus if needed. The key features of a deliberative process are to come to a decision by providing information, prioritising and weighing solutions. Deliberation can be scaled to fit the size and impact of the project. Some projects may require a skilled facilitator to ensure a fair and equitable process.

This method is best suited for projects whose outcome will have a far reaching or long term effect and issues where there is considerable community concern or division about the options. Examples of deliberative practices in Brimbank may include:

- Working with committees, advisory groups or reference groups over time.
- Working groups run through a Councillor portfolio.
- Participants are asked to consider and prioritise ideas.
- A representative group participates in a series of information sharing and discussions so as to reach a consensus.

Our Engagement Process

1.

Define Project

2.

Identify Stakeholders

3.

Design engagement process

4.

Deliver the engagement

5.

Evaluate feedback and data

6.

Share feedback

7.

Evaluate project

Council's approach to the design and delivery of engagement practices consists of seven key phases:

Step 1: Defining the project

The project must have a clearly defined scope, purpose and objectives so the community understands the level of influence they have on the decision making process and are provided with transparent information.

Step 2: Identifying stakeholders

This stage seeks to determine who needs to be involved, and how they will be involved and their level of interest. There must be a process of both external and internal stakeholder mapping to ensure that those directly impacted by the project, or have interest or influence, will have the opportunity to participate in the decision making process.

Step 3: Designing the engagement process

With a clear understanding of project parameters and key stakeholders, Council determines the level of engagement based on the IAP2 level of engagement. The IAP2 Spectrum identifies and defines each of the five levels of engagement. It details promise to the community and example methodologies for each level of engagement ensuring that both Council and the community have shared expectations and understanding of the commitment to engage.

Participatory engagement and deliberative engagement methods and formats will be scaled to suit project complexity and the level of influence. Therefore where deliberation is deemed essential, as described in our engagement framework, Council will be further guided by the following five (5) deliberative engagement principles:¹⁰

- 1. Randomly selected participants** are selected through a process using, as far as possible, random selection that provides as unbiased and representative cross-section of the community as practical.
- 2. Ample time is allowed** for participants to understand the issue, weigh up the options put forward and make thoughtful and informed recommendations.
- 3. There is a clear remit**, Council should provide a clearly defined scope of interest that openly shares the problem to be addressed.
- 4. Upfront authority**, participants must be assured that Council will give careful consideration to their recommendations.
- 5. Provision of a broad range of information** representing a diversity of viewpoints must be available for deliberations to lead to an informed and considered outcome.

¹⁰ KJA Engaging Solutions and New Democracy Foundation, Deliberation at a scale, Principles and practical ideas for small rural councils, 2017

Step 4: Delivering the engagement

A project engagement strategy and implementation plan must be developed prior to engaging the community. During this process much consideration is taken to understand best practices to encourage community members to participate and mitigate any barriers to participation. Much consideration and emphasis is placed on ensuring Council practice our Policy Principles. Council connect with existing networks, go to where the community is and the impact lies, consider provision of accessible opportunities for all to engage equally, provide varying methods and ways to engage in the project and offer information that is inclusive, transparent and fair.

Step 5: Evaluation and data analysis

As part of Brimbank's objective for continuous improvement and innovation, this step requires that the community engagement feedback and data is analysed. If different data collection processes have been used, treat each data set separately. Analyse common data sets or information to identify community preferences, priorities and themes.

Step 6: Sharing the Feedback

This stage is where Council communicates the community's feedback to decision makers for their consideration. Once a decision is made, Council communicates details about the engagement process, its findings and any decisions made to participants and relevant stakeholders through for example sending letters, emails or posting outcomes on the Council's website. It is particularly important to provide detail about how any decisions were made. These outcomes should also be shared with Council colleagues and additional key stakeholders. The final outcomes of the engagement process should be made available via a range of communication methods to the wider public.

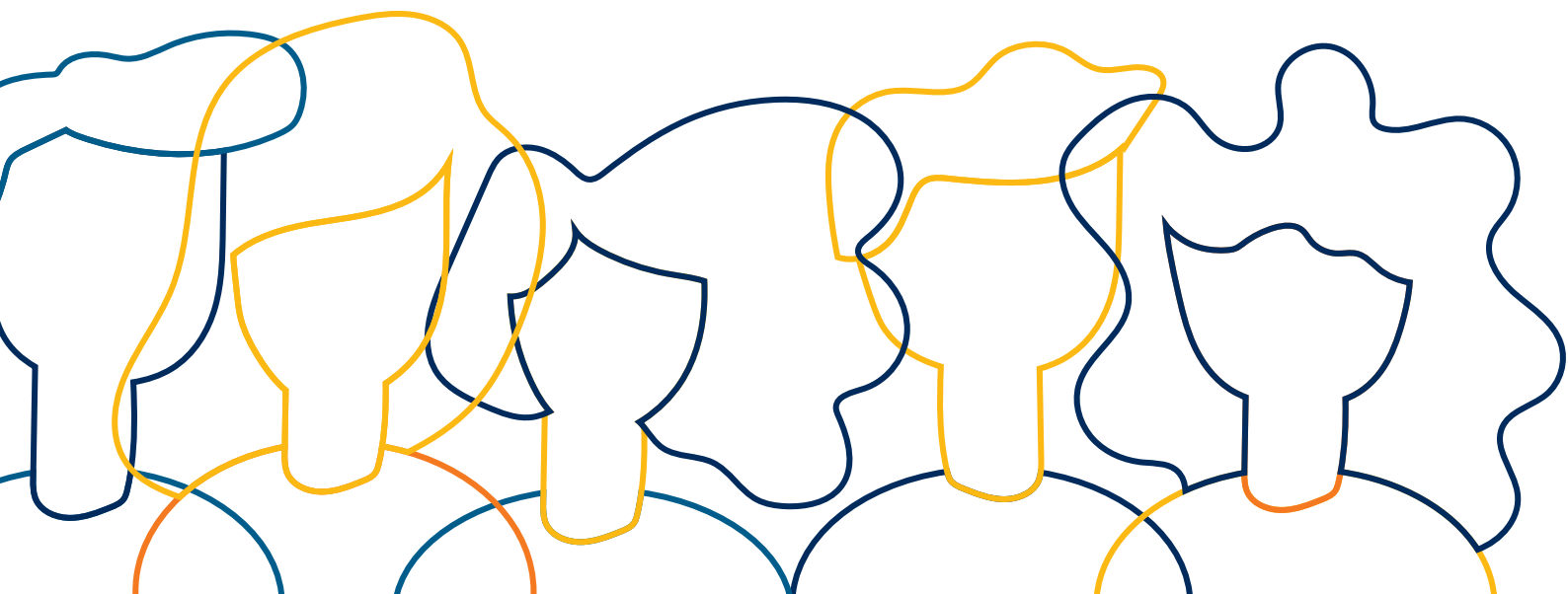
Step 7: Evaluate Project

The final stage involves evaluating the process undertaken to identify any key learnings and understand the effectiveness of the process. Evaluation criteria will ideally be identified at the start of the project. Evaluation should consider not only the effectiveness of the process but also analysis of who was involved and how effective the methods used were in capturing a representative sample of the identified community. Evaluations should summarise the key learnings and be shared with the project team and Council colleagues. These learnings should be considered before planning new engagement processes and used to further improve our engagement practice.

Engagement Resources

Some of the community engagement resources to support the implementation of this include:

- 1. Research** – The Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey facilitated by the local Government Performance Reporting, Analysis and Support Team, Department of Environment Land and Planning. The survey helps us compare our customer satisfaction ratings with other Victorian Councils and benchmark our performance from year to year.
- 2. Professional development** - Opportunities to participate in trainings, conferences, seminars or to subscribe to community engagement journals will be provided to staff to increase their understanding of our community engagement approach in order for staff to deliver sound engagement projects across the organisation.
- 3. Community Engagement Toolkit** – This toolkit has been developed to help Council staff engage with their communities in a meaningful and open manner. The toolkit defines our communication channels and tools that can be used to support our engagement activities, e.g. Your Say Brimbank website, Social media, e-Newsletters, media promotions, drop in sessions, surveys etc.



Legislative Environment

In addition to *The Act*, this Policy has been assessed in accordance with the requirements of the following;

1. *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*
2. *Public Administration Act 2004*
3. *Planning and Environment Act (1987)*
4. *Equal Opportunity Act 2010*
5. *Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008)*
6. *Child Safety Act 2015*
7. Brimbank Council's Social Justice Charter



Monitoring, evaluation and review

Council values and supports innovation and creativity in driving continuous improvement and understanding the overall level of success in the Policy’s implementation.

The Policy will be reviewed every two years to ensure its effective and having a desired impact. Factors to determine this review will include legislative change, Policy gaps and any accumulation of critical issues in the Policy.

History of amendment

Rev	Review date	Reason for amendment	Next review date
A	21/08/2018	Adopted by Council	21/08/2020
B	16/02/2021	New <i>Local Government Act 2020</i>	16/02/2023
	Select date		Select date

Approved by Council:	<Select one>	Date approved by Council:	<Select date>
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References

1. ABS 2016 Census, Brimbank Quick Stats https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA21180
2. Brimbank Resilience Framework 2018-2022 <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/policies>
3. Brimbank Council Plans on tackling homelessness, Media Release, June 2020 <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/news-and-events/media-releases-2020/june-2020/council-plans-tackling-homelessness-brimbank>
4. Brimbank Life Long Learning Strategy 2018 <https://www.brimbank.vic.gov.au/strategies>
5. Deliberative Engagement for Victorian Councils, Mosaiclab handbook
6. KJA Engaging Solutions and New Democracy Foundation, Deliberation at a scale, Principles and practical ideas for small rural councils, 2017
7. Principles from the Public Participation in Government Decision making – Victorian Auditor General's Office and Local Government Bill 2018
8. Innovative citizen participation and new democracy institutions: Catching the deliberative wave - OECD 2020 Highlights
9. Debunking myths about 'deliberation', <http://www.maxhardy.com.au/tag/deliberative-community-engagement-process/>

Brimbank City Council

Telephone 9249 4000

Email info@brimbank.vic.gov.au

Post PO Box 70, Sunshine, VIC 3020

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- Speak & Listen 1300 555 727
- www.relayservice.gov.au, then enter 03 9249 4000



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