



Moreland
City Council

Community Engagement Policy

Outcomes of Community Engagement Report

November 2020



Contents

Introduction	4
About the project.....	4
Methodology	4
Findings.....	5
Hot topics.....	5
Areas for improvement.....	5
Setting the agenda.....	6
Timeliness	6
Closing the loop.....	6
Using the results	6
Reaching Moreland's diverse community	6
Contacting Moreland City Council	6
Over/ under consultation	6
Open communication.....	6
How should engagement be done	6
Where should engagement take place.....	7
What engagement methods are most useful	7
Communication/ promotion	7
Time	8
Using existing and other groups.....	8
Listen to learn.....	8
Educate people about the Council.....	8
Use a range of engagement methods.....	8
Advisory Committees	8
Children and young people.....	8
Who need to be engaged.	8
Feedback from the community during public exhibition of the draft policy and implementation plan ...	9
Conclusion	9
List of Council teams engaged on the draft Community Engagement Policy	10
List of community organisations, agencies and groups engaged to develop the draft Community Engagement Policy 2020.....	11

Introduction

About the project

In March 2020 a new Local Government Act was passed. This new act included a number of reforms related to community engagement and public participation in Council decision making. The act demands that all councils must update their community engagement policies to align with the requirements of the new act. There is also a requirement that the community must be engaged in the development of the policy. The new policy must be adopted by 1 March 2021.

This report outlines the engagement conducted as part of the process of developing a new Moreland City Council Community Engagement Policy along with the results of that engagement.

Methodology

Community engagement occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown period of August 2020. This presented a mixture of constraints and opportunities for community engagement. On one hand it was challenging to engage people without being face-to-face. On the other hand, some stakeholders stated that not meeting face-to-face made the engagement process more accessible. All conversations occurred either online or over the phone to accommodate physical distancing requirements.

The IAP2 level of engagement pursued to develop the policy was 'involve'. In this regard, Council sought to understand the concerns and aspirations of community members so that they could be incorporated into the policy to the maximum possible extent.

Community engagement included:

- Telephone conversations with community members and groups, involving approximately 70 people, and generating over 200 contributions.
- Online meetings with five of Moreland's Neighbourhood Houses, including conversations with approximately 45 people, generating over 100 contributions.
- 3 X Online *Participation Matters* Community Conversations attracting 38 participants.
- Consultation with Moreland's Advisory Committees including conversations with 73 participants.
- Targeted conversations with Aboriginal Elders, CALD communities, older adults, young people, children, people with a disability, the LGBTIQ+ community, affordable housing groups, environmental sustainability groups, students, and members of local businesses. Approximately 100 people were engaged from across these different groups.
- Digital consultation, including a short community questionnaire and ideas board that generated input from over 150 online contributors.
- Detailed input from Council officers including our internal network of community engagement champions who are currently enrolled in IAP2 community engagement training.
- Public exhibition of the draft policy and implementation plan for ten business days from 5 – 18 November 2020. During public exhibition members of our community could provide feedback on the draft policy and implementation plan via email or telephone. Community members could also engage with Council via a Questions and Answers tool and quick poll tool on the Conversations Moreland website.

A list of Council Advisory Committees and working groups, as well as community organisations, agencies and groups engaged in the development of the Community Engagement Policy is shown in **Appendix 1**.

Community engagement sought to understand what local issues are important to our community; how people want to be involved in decision making, and what might encourage or prevent them from having a say. We also asked our community to provide advice about the guiding principles that should

underpin this policy, and how, in general terms, Council should improve how it involves the community in its decisions.

To ensure that the engagement for this strategy was in keeping with the expectations of the new local government act two key questions were used to focus discussions:

- How can Council have better conversations with the community about decisions that impact Moreland?
- How can we create a culture of deeper deliberation around city decisions?

Community members were invited to think about these questions but were also free to bring up concerns or comments of a more general nature. Conversations were noted as close to verbatim as possible. The notes were then themed to understand the key points raised.

Findings

The findings of the engagement have been themed to help understand the results. These themes were not predetermined but developed as a result of the engagements. The themes identified were:

- Hot topics
- Areas for improvement
- What engagement should be done
- Where should engagement take place
- How should engagement be done
- Who need to be engaged.

Hot topics

The following were identified as hot topics by the community, and areas where Council should provide a higher standard of community engagement:

- Urban planning and development.
- Car parking projects.
- City infrastructure projects.
- Racism and discrimination.
- Open space projects.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has caused communities to want to get active in reshaping their community. The community wants to work with Council to rebuild and recover, and advocate to build back a better Moreland.
- Community members approve of Council's commitment to improving how it does engagement and applauds the appointment of a new Public Participation Team.

Areas for improvement

Community members were keen to discuss areas where they feel Moreland could improve their engagement, these are discussed below.

Setting the agenda

There was a level of frustration over how engagement was managed by Council. Generally, Council engage the community in the topics that interest the Council rather than in the topics that interest the community. It was suggested that broader engagement sessions such as ward meetings or broad drop in sessions would be a good opportunity for community members to set the agenda.

Timeliness

Engagements need to be well planned in advance and community members need considerable notice to allow them to engage. It was suggested that a calendar of engagement could be developed and advertised widely via local newspapers, the council newsletter, posters in parks and public places, Facebook and community organisations. Currently many people do not hear about engagements in time to engage in a meaningful way.

Closing the loop

The results of the engagement and how they have been used needs to be fed back to the community, this is not consistently happening at the moment. It was also considered important that the results of engagements are provided to senior staff and Councillors to help them make good decisions. At times it might be appropriate to allow community members to speak to help the Council understand the complexity of the issues.

Using the results

There is a perception that the results of engagement are not necessarily honoured. Some areas of council are good at using the results while others do not appear to take notice of what the community says. It is important that the results of engagement are respected.

Reaching Moreland's diverse community

Significant parts of the community are not being reached. It would be good to work with groups and organisations who already engage these groups to get better engagement. The use of a range of media such as radio and newsletter might also help reach them. When promotional material is produced it should include graphics to make it easier to understand. Information needs to be provided in a range of languages.

Contacting Moreland City Council

Council and council systems can be intimidating. It is hard to know how to contact people within the council. Providing telephone numbers direct to staff members would be helpful. Some people don't feel comfortable contacting 'the council'. The offices in Coburg are physically distant for many community members and a bit intimidating.

Over/ under consultation

Some people are over consulted and overburdened by requests for engagement while others are ignored. Consultation needs to be representative of the whole community.

Open communication

It is essential that Council are honest about the results of the engagements, even when they are not what they wanted or are unclear – report it truthfully.

How should engagement be done

The overriding issue for people engaged was that they were generally asked to engage on topics of interest to Council rather than ones that were of interest to them:

- It is important to ask the community about what interests them – give them the opportunity to set the agenda.

- There needs to be more deliberative engagement between council and the community, more of a conversation rather than always issues based.
- Some people within the community need to be supported to engage, this might include funding agencies/ organisations to support the engagement of hard to reach or disengaged groups.
- Ward meetings or place-based engagement are helpful for the community to raise the issues that interest them.
- Don't just go to the community with ideas, go to the community and ask them for their ideas. Or provide avenues for the community to submit suggestions and new initiatives.
- Where consultation is to be undertaken, Council should use the IAP2 Spectrum of Engagement to make clear to the community what level of engagement is being pursued. Ideally, Council should establish systems of engagement that involve talking with a representative sample of the community.
- Council should partner with existing community networks and not-for-profit groups to engage Moreland's diverse community in more sophisticated ways.
- Maximise the use of Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality Technology, other innovative technologies and applications like Tic Toc to make community engagement more interactive and fun, and to engage a wider community audience.
- Rather than overburdening the same members of the community with requests for consultation, Council should find more structured, coordinated ways to engage a more diverse range of people. For large scale projects with low community impact, Council could use a market research approach to consultation. Establish a pool of community members where you can draw samples of random participants to be involved in community engagement and pay people for their contributions.
- Council should focus on improving its consultation practice for matters of key interest to the Moreland community including car parking, city infrastructure and urban planning projects.
- The community said, 'less is more'. Council delivers an extensive program of infrastructure projects but these are generally considered to be of a poor standard. Due to a lack of consultation, improvement works do not meet community needs.
- Redistribute funding from the capital program to improving public participation practice.

Where should engagement take place

There was a general belief that engagement should take place within the community and that staff should go to the people:

- Consultations need to take place where people feel comfortable – go to them. Place based consultations are good.
- Utilise the existing groups, but be aware that a few people may be engaged in lots of groups so make sure you are really getting a broad spectrum of people.
- Online is a good way to engage many people.
- Use the neighbourhood houses as a conduit to the community.
- Use schools, sports clubs and the arts to engage people.

What engagement methods are most useful

Communication/ promotion

Community members suggested that Council should use a variety of channels to communicate about community engagement opportunities, including information in plain English and other languages. They identified the following channels as the most effective ways to communicate about upcoming engagement opportunities, in order of preference:

- Email
- Social media
- Direct mail
- Council publications
- Telephone
- Radio
- Newspapers
- Posters.

Time

Whichever method used it was considered essential that community members were given sufficient time to engage meaningfully. A calendar of engagements was suggested as a means of letting people know what engagements would be happening and when.

Using existing and other groups

Advisory groups or special interest groups were considered an important engagement tool. Councillors were considered an important conduit between the community and Moreland City Council.

Listen to learn

The importance of listening was raised by a number of people. They believed that some staff were good at this but some were not. The capacity to really listen and to engage with people with a willingness to understand was essential. There may be a need to train some staff members to do this better.

Educate people about the Council

To give community members the best opportunity to engage meaningfully they need to better understand how local government works. This should be part of the engagement process.

Use a range of engagement methods.

Involve local artists in community engagement processes to do things more creatively. Apply co-design methods to engage the local community in-depth on different matters that impact them.

Advisory Committees

All Council Advisory Committees should include representation from Moreland's diverse community; and membership needs to be regularly refreshed so that new community members have an opportunity to contribute.

Children and young people

Amplify the voices of children and young people in a range of different consultations. Partner with schools to engage young people in a coordinated and effective way.

Who need to be engaged.

While it was widely understood that their needs to be broad engagement there was a belief that some groups need to be specifically encouraged to engage as they are often overlooked these groups include:

- Children
- Young people
- People who don't speak/read English
- Older resident
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Diverse communities
- Vulnerable people
- People who have access issues

Engagement should be more representative of the local Moreland community.

Feedback from the community during public exhibition of the draft policy and implementation plan

The draft policy and implementation plan went on public exhibition for viewing and feedback from 5-18 November 2020.

Community members were invited to provide feedback on the draft documents by emailing or calling Council, or providing feedback using digital tools on Council's Conversations Moreland website. Digital tools included a Quick Poll tool and Live Questions and Answers tool.

During the public exhibition period Council received a relatively small amount of feedback from the community about the draft policy and implementation plan. Community members asked ten questions through the Live Questions and Answers tool on the Conversations Moreland website. Seven community members provided direct feedback about the draft policy via email, and three community members provided feedback to Council about the policy over the phone.

Feedback on the draft policy and implementation plan received via email and telephone channels was positive and affirmed that the draft policy and implementation plan responded to community views and concerns expressed during the stage one community engagement process. A number of detailed submissions were made from the community via email, suggesting minor changes to improve disability access and inclusion outcomes through the policy. Amendments were made to the policy based on community feedback where this was appropriate.

However, a few concerns about the draft Community Engagement Policy were raised by the community via questions submitted on the Conversations Moreland website. Specifically, concerns related to whether or not the draft policy might apply to past projects of Council, or projects that will be considered by the new Council, in particular, projects at Hosken Reserve.

A recommendation of this report is that pending Council adoption, Council has regard to the Community Engagement Policy when considering remnant projects, or projects where decision making will undergo a review process.

Conclusion

The consultations demonstrated a strong willingness to engage and a desire to work with Moreland City Council, however, this engagement must be meaningful. Providing carefully considered opportunities for community members to have a real impact on decisions that impact them was key. This can be achieved by providing good, timely information about projects, listening carefully to a representative sample of community members and using the information to make decisions.

Appendix 1

List of Council teams engaged on the draft Community Engagement Policy

In addition to this list, three meetings were held with the Conversations Moreland Action Group, which is a group of internal community engagement champions, comprising membership from all branches of Council.

Seven briefing sessions were also held with staff across the organisation, attracting over 80 people.

Meetings were also held with the Directors and directorate leadership teams from all areas of Council.

Directorate	Branch/Unit
Engagement and Partnerships	Economic Development
	Complaints
	Customer Service
	Communications
	Places
	Property
	Public Participation
City Infrastructure	Amenity and compliance
	Capital works
	Asset management
	Building projects
	Engineering services
	MP2 Project Office
	Open Space Design and Development
Community development	Open Space Maintenance
	Early years and youth
	Wellbeing
	Community Development and Social Policy
	Cultural Development
Business transformation	Recreation Services
	Corporate governance
	Finance and procurement
	Organisational performance

	Human Resources
City futures	Sustainable communities
	Transport
	City Development
	Urban Planning
	City Strategy and Design
	Strategic Planning
	Strategy and Research
	Urban design

List of community organisations, agencies and groups engaged to develop the draft Community Engagement Policy 2020.

List of Council advisory committees and working groups	
Moreland Arts Advisory Committee	Reconciliation Working Group
Moreland Housing Advisory Committee	Disability Working Group
Moreland Family and Children's Services Advisory Committee	Gender Equity Reference Group
Human Rights Advisory Committee	Wurundjeri Elders in consultation with Council
Moreland Libraries Advisory Committee (MorLAC)	
List of stakeholder groups, agencies and networks	
Australian Society of Social Workers	Merri Health
ACES (Aboriginal Community Elders Services)	Moomba Park Primary School
ANTaR Victoria	Moreland Community Engagement Reference Group
Arabic Welfare	Moreland Primary School
Ballerrtt Mooroop Working Group	NEAMI
Barkly Square Centre Management	NECCHI Newlands Road Neighbourhood House
Brotherhood of St Lawrence	Neighbours United on Climate Action (NUCA)
Brunswick Neighbourhood House	Northern Moreland Combined Playgroup Association
Brunswick Primary School	North West Early Learning
Brunswick Residents Network	Open Table
CERES	Oxygen Youth Centre
Coburg Primary School	Public Value Studio
Coburg Moreland Elderly Chinese Group	Playgroup Victoria
Community Information Moreland	Pronia
Darul Ulum College	Reynard Street Neighbourhood House

Department of Education and Training	RMIT (VICSEG New Futures RMIT Social Work Program)
Democracy Lab	Salvation Army
DIVRS	Scope
Drummond Street Services	Spectrum
ECCV	Sussex Neighbourhood House
Fairsharefare	St Marks Primary School
Fawkner Community House	St Pauls Catholic Primary School
Fawkner Food Bowls	University of Melbourne
Fawkner Kindergarten	Welcoming Cities
Fawkner Service Providers Network	Wellways
Glenroy Chinese Women's group	Womens Property Initiatives Coburg Townhouses
Glenroy Neighbourhood Learning Centre	University of the Third Age (U3A)
K20 Architecture	Victoria Police
Longboat Development	Yarn Strong Sista
Melbourne Polytechnic	YMCA