COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY AMENDMENT 2023 – WHAT WE HEARD AND WHAT WE'RE DOING

Submitter #	What we heard	What we're doing
1	Well I don't believe that you properly canvas the community as I saw comments on Twitter that people were surprised that the name change had not been properly and openly available. So I feel that even this avenue does not cover all rate payers to give their views.	This is a statement and does not have a direct impact on the Policy amendments; therefore, no change is required. The submitter will be contacted to see if they wish to further discuss their comment.
2	I wish to commend the Council for increasing the time for residents to respond at the final stage of consultation. I think this important to provide a reasonable amount of time for residents to contribute, given that we are trying to fit our involvement in around our other work and life commitments. I would like clarification on how 'impacted by an issue' is defined when determining who the Council will consult with at the early stages of a consultation process. For example, with changes to parks, or land adjacent to parks (e.g., Clifton or Gilpin Parks), who is considered 'impacted'? I think the whole of Brunswick, if not all of Merri-Bek should be consulted for these core green spaces.	Whilst this comment does not warrant an amendment to the Policy (level of impact is a complexity that is determined per stakeholder based on the level of interest each stakeholder group has), the submitter will be responded to via email to explain how level of impact is determined.
3	Currently Merri-bek Council has both reference groups and advisory groups, with advisory groups having a greater say in Council's policies, strategies and actions. There is no logic to this division. All groups should be Advisory groups.	The defining features of Advisory Committees are identified in Council's Governance Rules and Community Engagement Policy 2020. In summary, Advisory Committees must: • be chaired by a nominated Councillor but can be attended by more than one Councillor.

		- have a Terms of Reference document that is adopted by Council.
		- operate for the term of Council (3-4 years).
		- have group agreements about:
		    o transparent recruitment of members.
		    o roles of members clearly stated in Terms of Reference.
		    o how to deal with conflicts of interest.
		    o how to deal with confidential matters.
		- report to Council about the outcomes of Committee discussions on an annual basis with reports including the details of any conflicts of interest.
		- advise Council in relation to local issues (e.g. transport) or community group issues (e.g. youth issues).
		- Make the following information available on Council's website:
		    o names of members
		    o key documents (Terms of Reference, Agendas and Meeting Minutes).
		
		Advisory Committees differ from Reference Groups and Working Groups in that they have formalised structures as outlined above. Councillor chairing of Reference Groups and Working Groups

		is also optional. Reference Groups and Working Groups can meet in flexible formats such as workshops, site visits and community conferences, and reporting back to Council occurs as part of annual portfolio reporting.
		Reference Groups oversee the planning and development of a project and give advice aimed at progressing the project to agreed objectives and timeframes.
		Working Groups act collaboratively to deliver a specific project or initiative (e.g. a plan or strategy) to agreed timeframes and budgets, and disband once the project, initiative or agreed to actions have been delivered.
4	I did not participate in the consultation on the Community Engagement Policy in 2020, because I had already participate, in consultation on the Governance Rules, Public Transparency Policy and other Council issues.	This is a statement and does not have a direct impact on the Policy amendments; therefore, no change is required.
4	I agree that the Community Engagement Principles of section 56 of the LGA Act 2020 should be included in the Policy, but in my opinion this should not be an Appendix. The overarching governance principles of the Act require that Council decisions and actions are taken in accordance with the relevant law. Therefore, section 56 of the Act should be mentioned early in the Policy - in the section for Policy Principles.	Based upon this feedback and in consultation with the team, we agree with this point and will move the Local Government Act community engagement principles from Appendix 2 to the Policy Principles section of the document. The original policy principles that were developed through community consultation in 2020 will be moved to Appendix 2.

4	I agree with the changes regarding 15 business days instead of 10 business days.	This is a statement of agreement and therefore, no change is required.
4	I think that other aspects of the policy could be improved.	This is a statement and does not have a direct impact on the Policy amendments; therefore, no change is required.
4	The Local Government Inspectorate published a Report on "Checking Compliance: A Review of Council Policies" on 16th January 2023 (https://www.lgi.vic.gov.au/checking-compliance-review-council-policies), and there are 2 recommendations that are relevant to the Community Engagement Policy. Recommendation 9, Sample Policies for Self Assessment, which includes Community Engagement Policies from 2 other Local Councils. Recommendation 5, Format of Policies, which recommends that policies should include standard information such as date of the next review, summary of changes made, date adopted. These are good recommendations and Councillors should adopt these recommendations.	We are aware of the recommendations given in the Local Government Inspectorate. The Local Government Association of Victoria and Municipal Association of Victoria also have examples of best-practice community engagement policies, developed by other councils. When the life of this current Policy comes to an end, we will take the opportunity to review the Policy and make amendments to it, taking into consideration a range of factors and reports.
4	In my opinion, Councillors should establish a committee similar to one that Kingston City Council has - a Governance and Policy Committee (ref. page 72 of Kingston Annual Report 2021-2022 https://www.kingston.vic.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/hptrim/council-administration-governance-general/city-of-kingston-annual-report-2021-22_v.-16-final.pdf) The Governance and Policy Committee should be responsible for maintaining and developing policies, especially policies that the LGA 2020 requires Councillors to adopt.	We are confident that we have adequate practices in place for example, a register of policies and the organisation has responsibilities to develop and maintain policies in accordance with the Act. These are reviewed by an Executive Committee, and external policies which are subject to community engagement are reviewed and endorsed by Council. Council already has an Audit and Risk Committee that oversees and can review policies.

		The Audit and Risk Committee, via its Charter, must: "Assess the Council's policy framework and procedures to ensure the embedding of the governance principles" (section 4.1.3).
4	One particular section of the Community Engagement Policy is incorrect, and that is the section about the Role of the Mayor in Community Engagement on page 17 of the Policy. This section should be deleted because it conflicts with section 28(1c) of the LG Act 2020 that says "The role of EVERY COUNCILLOR is to …… to contribute to the strategic direction of the Council through the development and review of key strategic documents of the Council, including the Council Plan"	Whilst it is the responsibility of all Councillors to contribute to Council's strategic direction, section 18 (1c) of the LG Act explicitly states that: "The role of the Mayor is to lead engagement with the municipal community on the development of the Council Plan", hence the specific inclusion of this section in the Policy. The role of Councillors has been updated on page 5 under the section "Policy scope and our roles and responsibilities" to reflect section 28 of the Act.
4	Appendix 3 of the Policy, the Definitions, has definitions of working groups and reference groups that does not match the Governance Rules, nor the overarching governance principle of transparency.	The Governance Rules do not provide a definition of working groups or reference groups; however, they are defined as: Reference Groups oversee the planning and development of a project and give advice aimed at progressing the project to agreed objectives and timeframes. Working Groups act collaboratively to deliver a specific project or initiative (e.g. a plan or strategy)

		to agreed timeframes and budgets, and disband once the project, initiative or agreed to actions have been delivered. Councillor chairing of Reference Groups and Working Groups is also optional. Reference Groups and Working Groups can meet in flexible formats such as workshops, site visits and community conferences, and reporting back to Council occurs as part of annual portfolio reporting.
4	Appendix 4, Legislative Context, does not mention the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations Schedule 1 Governance and Management Checklist. In particular the requirement for Community Engagement Guidelines. In my opinion, Councillors should look at the policy / framework / handbook of Whitehorse City Council and Monash City Council. A 2nd document would fulfil the requirements of the Regulations AND the overarching governance principle of transparency. Also see section 55(g) and (h) of the LG Act 2020 in regards to references to the Regulations.	Appendix 4 has been updated to include the Local Government (Planning and Reporting) Regulations Schedule 1. Council already has a set of internal guidelines and factsheets designed to give officers clear guidance on how to plan and deliver community engagement in line with the requirements of the Act. Further work on this toolkit and the development of an organisational strategy and framework is ongoing.