

## Community Engagement Policy Engagement Summary

November 2023

### Introduction

Under the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Councils are required to have a Community Engagement Policy that is used to guide genuine and meaningful community engagement.

Our first [Community Engagement Policy: A Voice for All](#) was adopted by Council in March 2021 and was committed to be reviewed in 2023. The Policy is being updated to support the maturity of the function at the City of Whittlesea following an internal review as well as benchmarking best practice community engagement in the public sector.

The draft updated policy, while acknowledging the many forms of broad community engagement, such as Coffee with Council, speaks to the more formal community engagement as required under the Act. Presented on Council's new policy template it focuses on clarifying expectations and highlighting Council's commitment to the engagement principles as spelled out in the Act.

Council is committed to providing a structured and transparent framework for purposeful, genuine and meaningful community engagement. This policy sets out how Council will provide opportunities for our diverse community to share ideas, opinions and feedback about activities, projects and issues that are important to them.

Council commits to engage in a deliberative, proactive and flexible way to ensure the voices of its community are heard and considered in Council decision-making.

The key differences of the updated policy include:

- **our commitment to legislated engagement principles**; a clearer focus on clarifying expectations and articulating our commitment to the engagement principles as outlined in the Local Government Act
- **clarity on our community's level of influence**; community feedback will inform decision-making alongside other factors including research, best practice, legislations, risk, budget and specialist technical advice
- **ensuring we remain transparent**; Council will clearly inform participants and the community what they can and cannot influence, how they can participate, and what opportunity there is for them to influence a decision
- **ensuring legislative compliance**; the updated policy ensures all relevant legislation is referenced.

### How we engaged you

Council presented the draft updated Community Engagement Policy to the community for feedback between 2 October and 29 October 2023.

Along with the draft Policy, Council highlighted the four key differences of the updated policy with participants online and at seven community-based pop-ups and asked them whether they supported the updated policy using 'yes', 'no' or 'not sure' options.

Participants were able to provide any further feedback/comments.

### **What we asked**

To gain further insight from the community on their engagement and communication preferences, participants were asked a further two questions:

1. What would be your preferred method to engage with Council to share insights and feedback?  
Multiple choice answer selection was used which offered the below options:
  - online through the Engage Whittlesea platform
  - at a community-based pop-up
  - participate in a Community Focus Group to allow for more in-depth discussion
  - attend a project information drop-in session
  - email
  - at a presentation delivered to the group/club I am a part of
  - other (please specify).
2. How would you prefer to be informed of community consultations? Multiple choice answer selection was used which offered the below options:
  - register as a member for the Engage Whittlesea platform and receive notifications
  - email
  - social media
  - local Scoop bi-monthly print newsletter
  - poster/ flyer in local community centre or library
  - through my local Community Development Officer
  - project specific on-site engagement
  - project specific letter/ flyer in the post (if possible)
  - other (please specify).

Online participants were asked an additional question as below:

At what location would you like to see a community-based pop up? Multiple choice answer selection was used which offered the below options:

- shopping centres
- library
- community centre
- church/ temple
- parks/ playgrounds
- other.

### **Making our engagement accessible**

The Engage Whittlesea platform utilises an accessibility add-on ensuring that it is as accessible as possible for all users. The platform also has an in-built translation tool so that the information provided can be translated into the audience's preferred language to ensure it is understood.

Bi-lingual staff attended targeted community-based pop-up sessions to support in person communication.



**Let's talk** **DRAFT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

1. DO YOU SUPPORT THE DRAFT?

YES	NO	NOT SURE
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2. WHAT WOULD BE YOUR PREFERRED METHOD TO ENGAGE WITH COUNCIL TO SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS AND FEEDBACK ON FUTURE CONSULTATIONS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

ENGINE THROUGH ENGAGE WHITTLESEA PLATFORM	PARTICIPATE IN A COMMUNITY FOCUS GROUP TO ALLOW MORE IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION	EMAIL	AT A PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP TO THE GROUP/ I AM A PART OF
AT A COMMUNITY-BASED POP-UP	ATTEND A PROJECT INFORMATION DROP-IN SESSION	HARD COPY IN THE POST	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)

3. WE WANT TO ENSURE OUR COMMUNITY KNOW WHEN WE ARE SEEKING FEEDBACK. HOW WOULD YOU PREFER TO BE INFORMED OF COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)

REGISTER AS A MEMBER OF THE ENGAGE WHITTLESEA PLATFORM AND RECEIVE NOTIFICATIONS	EMAIL	SOCIAL MEDIA	LOCAL SCOP 90-MONTHLY PRINT NEWSLETTER
POSTER/FLYER IN LOCAL COMMUNITY CENTRE OR LIBRARY	TURN ON MY LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICER	PROJECT SPECIFIC ON-SITE SIGNAGE	PROJECT SPECIFIC LETTER/ FLYER IN THE POST
OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)			

Under the **Local Government Act 2020** Council are required to have a Community Engagement Policy that is used to guide genuine and meaningful community engagement.

Our first Community Engagement Policy: **A Voice for All** was adopted by Council in March 2021 and we are currently in the process of updating this policy to:

- foster community connection and collaboration and civic participation
- build trust between the community and council by showing how opinions are sought, valued and considered in shaping the future of the City of Whittlesea
- remain transparent by being clear on why and how we engage our community and how feedback is used.

While the draft updated policy is not substantially different in intent to the original, it now reflects the changes and advancement of the engagement function at the City of Whittlesea in recent years.

Key differences include:

<b>OUR COMMITMENT TO LEGISLATED ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES</b> A clearer focus on clarifying expectations and spelling out our commitment to the engagement principles as outlined in the Local Government Act.	<b>CLARITY ON OUR COMMUNITY'S LEVEL OF INFLUENCE</b> Community feedback will inform decision-making alongside other factors including research, best practice, legislation, risk, budget and specialist technical advice.	<b>ENSURE WE REMAIN TRANSPARENT</b> Council will clearly inform participants and the community what they can and cannot influence, how they can participate, and what opportunity there is for them to influence a decision.	<b>ENSURE LEGISLATIVE COMPLIANCE</b> The updated policy ensures all relevant legislation is referred to.
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Above: information board and dot board activity used at the community-based pop-ups.

## Stakeholders consulted

Key stakeholders and the wider community were informed of the consultation through a range of channels including electronic direct mail, social media and flyers. Key stakeholders were emailed by relevant Council Officers to highlight the proposed changes and seek feedback on the policy update and provided with a link to the project Engage page where the draft policy could be accessed, and feedback shared.

Targeted stakeholders included:

- Council registered community and CALD groups
- Advisory groups and networks including:
  - Whittlesea Disability Network
  - Whittlesea Interfaith Network
  - Whittlesea Reconciliation Group
  - Youth Advisory Committee
  - Community Leadership Program participants
  - members of the recent Community Priorities community focus group.

Eight community-based pop-ups were held in high foot traffic locations. These were:

- Citizenship Ceremonies at Civic Centre on 9 October from 11am – 12.30pm and 2pm – 3.30pm
- Lalor Library on 11 October from 9.30am - 11.30am
- Mernda Village Community Activity Centre on 12 October from 10.30am - 12.30pm
- Community Forum at Galada Community Centre on 17 October from 6.15pm - 7.15pm
- Mill Park Library on 23 October from 11.30am - 1.30pm
- Kirrip Community Centre on 24 October from 10am – 12pm
- Diwali Festival South Morang on Saturday 28 October from 12pm – 5pm
- Citizenship Ceremonies at Civic Centre on 2 November from 11am – 12.30pm and 2pm – 3.30pm



Above: Project team engaging at the Mernda Village Community Activity Centre.

## Participation

A total of 156 contributions were made during the community engagement period. A snapshot of consultation activities and community participation is below:



8 community-based pop-ups



139 in-person contributions



291 visitors to the project Engage page



17 digital contributions



Draft documents downloaded 35 times



55% Female, 45% Male,



44% aged 35 - 54  
28% aged over 66 years



4% person living with a disability



74% CALD community members

## What we heard

When asked if they were supportive, 94% of participants indicated they support the draft Community Engagement Policy. (Full results below with a breakdown of what was heard at each community-based pop-up available in Appendix 2).



(94%)  
Yes



(6%)  
Not Sure



(0%)  
No

## Additional comments

Participants had the opportunity to provide additional comments with six people taking advantage of this opportunity (four online and two in person).

The main themes of the comments were:

- how feedback has shaped a project outcome should be shared back with the community
- customer service turnaround time for enquiries
- need to offer digital and non-digital engagement opportunities as not everyone is computer literate.

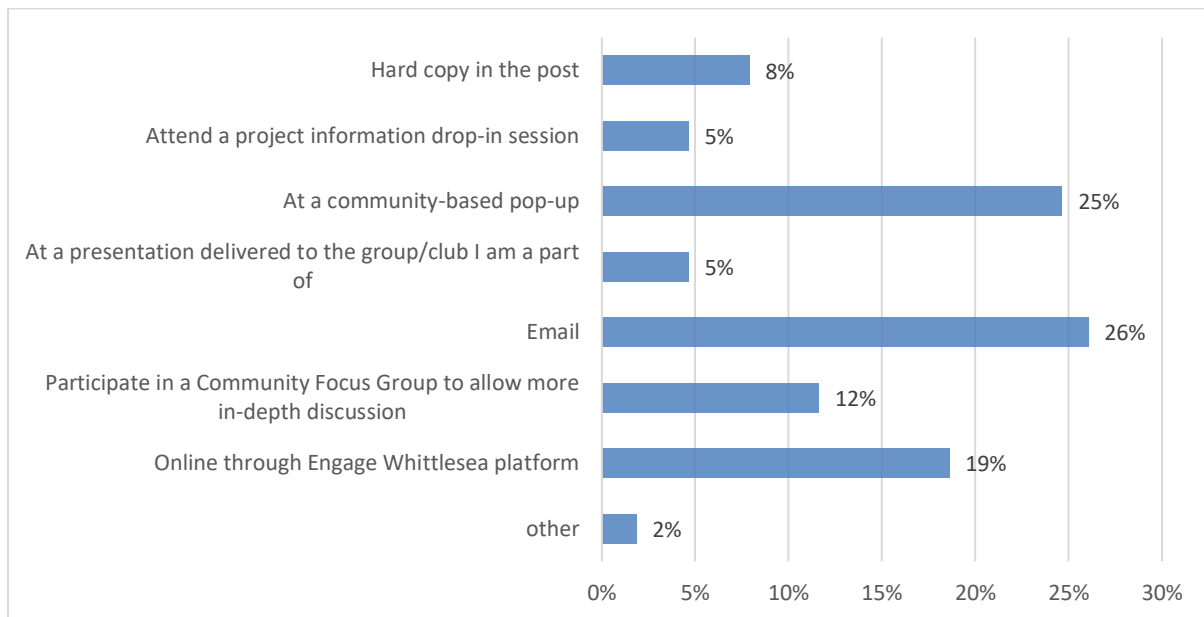
Please DO NOT forget that NOT EVERY resident in the City of Whittlesea is computer literate. A lot of people rely on families to let them know what is going on within their municipality, often not getting the opportunity to have their say.

Love to join focus group and community consultation meeting if it's after hours

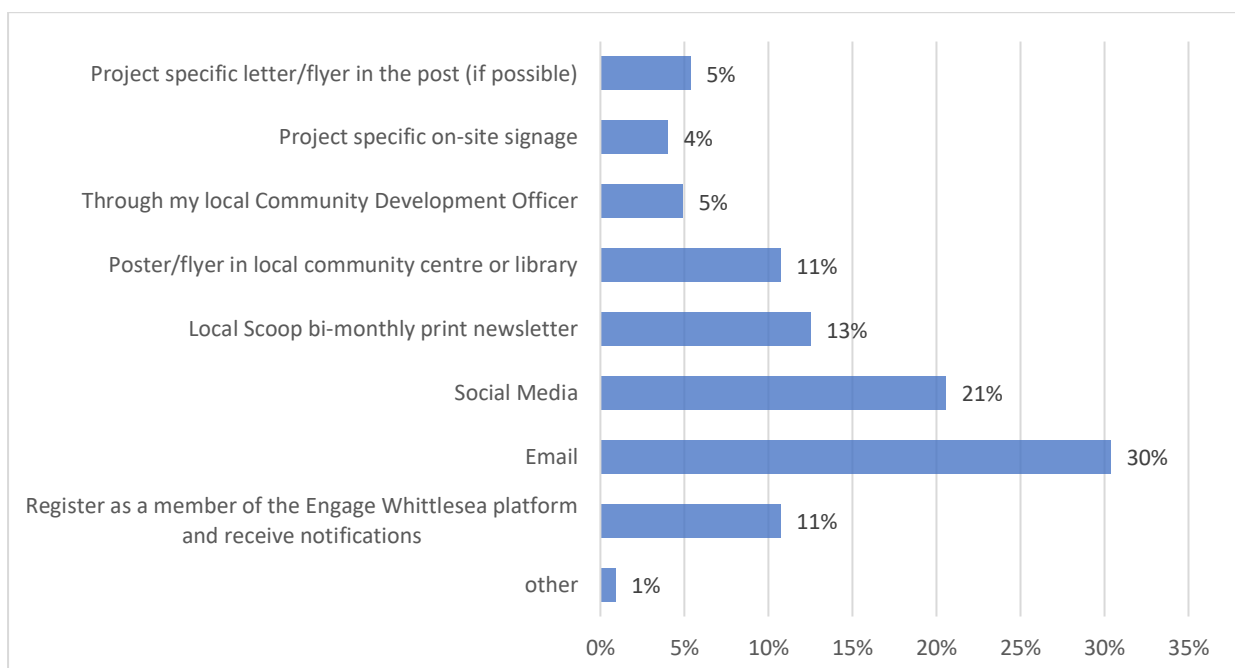
The additional comments received from six community members did not result in any amendments to the policy as the comments related to specific projects or were already addressed in the policy. Refer to Appendix 1 to see how the comment themes captured are addressed in the Policy.

## How people like to be engaged

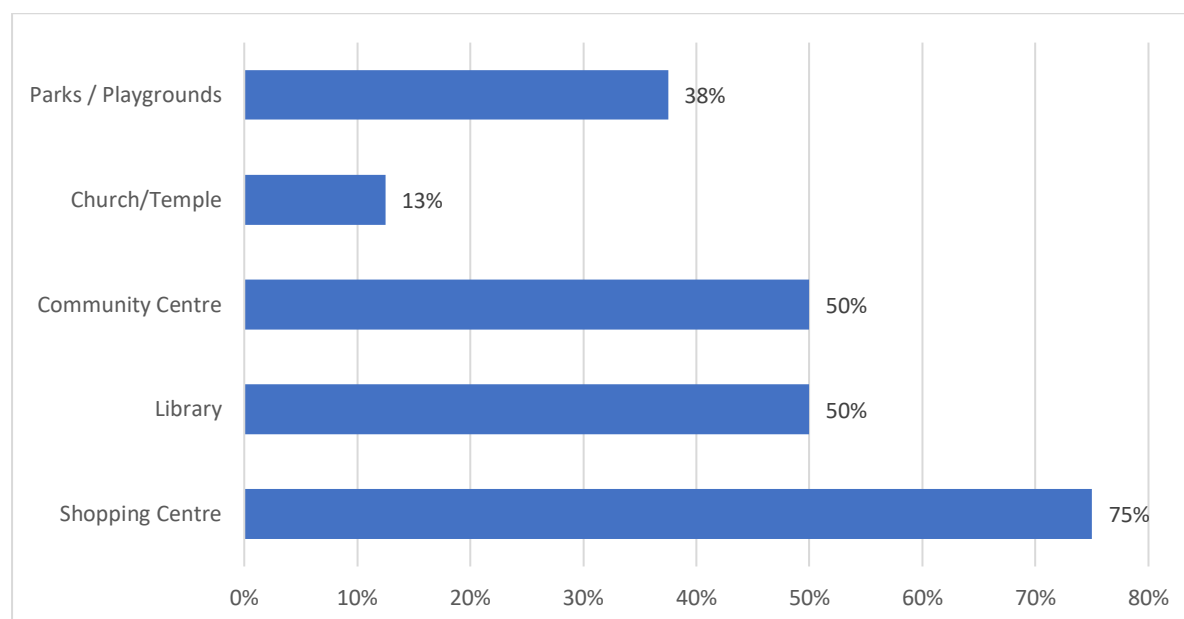
Participants indicated their preferred method to engage with Council to share insights and feedback was via email (26%), at a community-based pop-up (25%) and online through the Engage Whittlesea platform (18%). Below are the full results captured for this question.



When asked how they prefer to be informed of community consultations, the communications channels most appealing were email (31%), social media (21%) and in Local Scoop bi-monthly print newsletter (13%). Below are the full results captured for this question.



Those that participated in the engagement online were asked to indicate where they'd like to see community-pop-ups held and were able to select more than one of the available responses. Majority of participants (75%) indicated shopping centres were the preferred location, followed by libraries (50%) and community centres (50%). Below are the full results captured for this question.



## Next steps

The revised draft Community Engagement Policy will be presented to Council for adoption on 19 December 2023. Once adopted the updated policy will be shared with the community. This will be shared through digital communications, direct contact with stakeholders, and updates on the project Engage page.



## Appendix 1

Feedback captured during community consultation generally related to specific projects or what was suggested was already covered in the policy. Below are the main themes captured and how these are addressed in the policy.

- **How feedback has shaped a project outcome should be shared back with community**  
A key principle of the Community Engagement Policy is informing participants in community engagement of the ways in which the community engagement process will influence Council decision making. We are committed to reporting back to the community in a timely manner to share what we heard and how that community feedback informed the decision-making process. An engagement summary report will be shared following each community engagement that will present what was captured through the consultation. Subsequent project communications will highlight how feedback was used to shape the project.
- **Turnaround time from customer service**  
Timelines for general customer service enquiries fall outside of the Community Engagement Policy. As part of the Community Engagement Policy Council is committed to communicating how and when a decision will be made. Each community engagement will have a clear timeline that is communicated to participants.
- **Need to offer digital and non-digital engagement opportunities as not everyone is computer literate**  
A key principle of the Community Engagement Policy is participants having access to objective, relevant and timely information to inform their participation. Council is committed to presenting information in plain language and will make use of accessible formats and information in other languages where appropriate to support participation in community engagement. We will use a variety of traditional and digital communication channels to inform our community about the opportunity to engage.

Another key principle of the Community Engagement Policy is participants being entitled to reasonable support to enable meaningful and informed engagement. Council will use different engagement methods to ensure it hears from key stakeholders and our community at a time and in a way that suits them.

We will design engagement opportunities that are inclusive and accessible and make reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers to participation. We will provide sufficient time to provide feedback to ensure those impacted can participate in a meaningful way.



## Appendix 2

Below is the breakdown of the feedback captured at each community-based pop-up and through the project Engage page.

### Do you support the updated Community Engagement Policy?

Location	Yes	No	Not Sure	Total
Citizenship Ceremony October	10	0	0	10
Lalor Library	13	0	1	14
Mernda CAC	17	0	0	17
Community Forum Galada CC	14	0	0	14
Mill Park Library	17	0	0	17
Kirrip CC	8	0	0	8
Diwali Festival	45	0	2	47
Citizenship Ceremony November	12	0	0	12
Online	11	0	6	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>156</b>

### How would you prefer to engage with Council to share insights and feedback?

Option	Citizenship ceremony	Lalor Library	MVCAC	Comm Forum	Mill Park Library	Kirrip	Diwali	Citizenship ceremony	ONLINE	TOTAL
online engage platform	1	2	2	2	3	4	9	8	9	40
focus group	1	0	0	2	1	1	10	2	8	25
email	2	1	6	5	2	0	26	1	13	56
presentation at club/group	1	2	1	2	2	0	1	0	1	10
at pop ups	2	7	8	11	6	2	6	3	8	53
project drop in session	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	0	4	10
hard copy in post	1	1	0	1	2	0	7	0	5	17
other	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>215</b>

### How would you prefer to be informed of community consultations?

Option	Citizenship ceremony	Lalor Library	MVCAC	Community Forum	Mill Park Library	Kirrip	Diwali	Citizenship ceremony	ONLINE	TOTAL
register engage page	2	3	0	4	1	3	1	2	8	24
email	1	2	10	3	4	0	26	6	16	68
social media	1	0	2	5	5	5	13	7	8	46
local scoop	3	2	1	5	5	0	7	1	4	28
poster in comm facility	1	4	3	5	2	0	7	0	2	24
through Community Development Officer	1	0	0	5	0	0	3	0	2	11
project specific on-site signage	0	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	4	9
project specific letter in mail	1	2	1	1	0	0	2	0	5	12
other	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>224</b>

**At what location would you like to see a community-based pop up? (Online only)**

- Shopping centres 75%
- Library 50%
- Community Centre 50%
- Church/ Temple 12.5%
- Parks/ Playgrounds 37.5%
- Other 0%