

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY

|                |                        |                |                             |
|----------------|------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Policy No.     | C06                    | Adoption Date: | Council Meeting 20 May 2026 |
| Directorate:   | Strategy and Integrity | Department:    | Regional Partnerships       |
| Revision Date: | July 2030              |                |                             |

### GOOD GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
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| Supporting Pillar: | Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership<br>Pillar 5. Community Engagement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Link to Pillar:    | Establish good processes and delegations to ensure decisions consider local community and broader municipal interests, are consistent.<br>South Gippsland Shire Council actively seeks differing opinions to tailor services for the community and recognises the value of diverse views when decisions need to be made. |

#### 1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the *Community Engagement Policy (C06)* (the Policy) is to affirm South Gippsland Shire Council's commitment to genuine and effective community engagement as a cornerstone of good governance. It sets out the requirements for all engagement activities undertaken by Council, ensuring our decision-making is transparent, inclusive, and well-informed by diverse community perspectives.

#### 2. SCOPE

- 2.1. This Policy applies to all community engagement undertaken by, or on behalf of Council. This includes activities by Councillors, Council employees, contractors, consultants and volunteers.
- 2.2. The Policy applies to the development of key strategic documents, major projects and services. It does not apply to routine operational matters or engagement processes that are governed by other legislation, such as planning permit applications and planning scheme amendments.

#### 3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

##### Our Framework

- 3.1. This Policy is the foundation of the South Gippsland Shire Council Community Engagement framework. The framework provides clear and practical guidance for Council and the community. It consists of:
- **Community Engagement Policy (The 'Why'):** This overarching document defines our commitment and high-level principles, ensuring legislative compliance.

- **Community Engagement Strategy (The 'How'):** Outlines how we will implement the Policy over the next four years (2025-2029) to meet the strategic needs of the Shire. It translates our Policy commitments into key priorities and actions.
- **Community Engagement Toolkit (The 'How-to'):** An internal toolkit providing guides, tools and templates to support employees in delivering consistent, high-quality engagement.

### **Our Commitment**

- 3.2. Our commitment is to ensure the community is actively and meaningfully involved in shaping South Gippsland, that Council decisions are informed by diverse community perspectives, and that we continue to build trust and confidence between Council and the community we serve. We will do this by:
- 3.2.1. Consistently communicating engagement opportunities across multiple channels.
  - 3.2.2. Providing regular updates on projects we are engaging on.
  - 3.2.3. Ensuring all views are considered fairly.
  - 3.2.4. Sharing an overview of results to show what we heard from the community.

### **Implementation**

- 3.3. This Policy is implemented through the practical, operational direction set out in the *Community Engagement Strategy 2025-2029* and the guidance provided to employees in the internal *Community Engagement Toolkit*.

### **STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS**

- 3.4. The Victorian *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) sets the legislative requirements for Council's community engagement. Adherence to this Policy will ensure compliance with the Act.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- 3.5. This Policy is guided by the community engagement principles of the *Local Government Act 2020*. Council will actively apply these principles in all our engagement activities.

#### **A clearly defined objective**

- 3.6. **Our commitment:** Every engagement process will have a clearly stated objective, so participants know why they are being engaged.

#### **Access to objective, relevant, and timely information**

- 3.7. **Our commitment:** We will ensure participants have access to the information they need to help them participate in a meaningful way.

#### **Representative participation**

- 3.8. **Our commitment:** We will seek out and listen to a diverse range of voices that are representative of the people and groups affected by the matter at hand.

#### **Reasonable support for participants**

- 3.9. **Our commitment:** We will do our best to ensure engagement opportunities are accessible to people of all abilities, ages, genders and backgrounds within our available resources, actively reducing barriers to participation to hear from all parts of our community.

## Informing participants

3.10. **Our commitment:** Where possible, we will share a summary of the feedback received and explain how it has informed the outcomes.

## 4. RISK ASSESSMENT

This Policy provides a consistent and transparent approach for community engagement. Failure to adhere to this Policy presents significant risks, including:

- 4.1. **Erosion of community trust:** Inconsistent practices, particularly in providing feedback to participants, can damage Council's reputation and undermine community confidence in Council processes. This can lead to community disengagement, increased misinformation, and difficulty in delivering future projects and engagement processes.
- 4.2. **Non-compliance:** Failure to meet the statutory requirements of the *Local Government Act 2020* could lead to non-compliance.
- 4.3. **Poor decision-making:** Decisions made without the benefit of community input may not meet community needs or reflect their priorities, increasing the likelihood of poor outcomes and unintended negative consequences.
- 4.4. **Inefficient use of resources:** Poorly planned engagement can result in low-value outcomes, wasting both Council and community time and resources.
- 4.5. Council will manage these risks by following this Policy and using the supporting *Community Engagement Strategy* and *Community Engagement Toolkit*.

## 5. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

### Human Rights Charter

5.1. This Policy has considered the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

### Gender Equality

5.2. This Policy has considered the *Gender Equality Act 2020* in its development.

### Local Government Act 2020

5.3. This Policy has considered the requirements as outlined in the *Local Government Act 2020*.

### Roles and Responsibilities

- 5.4. Successful community engagement is a shared responsibility across Council and the community. The following outlines these key roles:
  - 5.4.1. **Councillors:** Act as strategic leaders and champions for community engagement, promote this Policy, and consider community feedback in their decision-making.
  - 5.4.2. **Executive Leadership Team:** Are responsible for ensuring this Policy is implemented, that employees are adequately resourced and trained, and for fostering a culture that values community engagement.
  - 5.4.3. **Council Employees:** Are responsible for planning, delivering, and evaluating all engagement activities in line with this Policy and the supporting strategy and toolkit.
  - 5.4.4. **The community:** Have a responsibility to participate constructively and respectfully, contributing their diverse perspectives and local knowledge to inform Council decision-making.

## 6. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

- 6.1. This Policy will be reviewed and adopted by Council on a four-year cycle.
- 6.2. Policies may be reviewed earlier than a four-year cycle if legislative provisions, Industry or organisation requirements change.

## 7. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Legislative Provisions                | Charter of Human Rights and Responsibility Act 2006<br>Freedom of Information Act 1982<br>Gender Equality Act 2020<br>Local Government Act 2020<br>Local Government (Finance and Reporting) Regulations 2004 |
| Council Supporting Documents          | Council Plan<br>Community Engagement Strategy<br>Employee Code of Conduct (CE20)<br>Local Government Model Code of Conduct                                                                                   |
| Related External Documents (optional) | <i>External Funding Application - Guidelines</i>                                                                                                                                                             |

## 8. DEFINITIONS

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Community Engagement     | A planned process with the specific purpose of working with the community to shape the decisions or actions of Council.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Deliberative Engagement  | An engagement process that brings together a representative sample of the community to consider an issue in-depth. Participants are provided with time, balanced information, and support to consider a complex issue and develop recommendations for Council.                                                                                                                                              |
| Participatory Engagement | A process where Council invites feedback from the community on specific ideas, proposals, or draft documents, and is open to any community member who chooses to take part. It is typically used when there are non-negotiable elements, meaning the overall direction may be set, but community input is needed to refine the approach. Common methods include surveys and calling for public submissions. |

## 9. REVISION HISTORY

| Approved By     | Approval Date    | Sections Modified | CM9 Ref# |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|----------|
| Council Meeting | 25 July 2018     | New Policy        | D5228818 |
| Council Meeting | 24 February 2021 | Revised Policy    | D1027921 |
| Council Meeting | 20 May 2026      | Revised Policy    | D4358526 |

## 10. ATTACHMENT SUMMARY

Nil