MANAWATU DISTRICT COUNCIL

Significance and Engagement Policy

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1. Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to:

- Aid the Council in assessing the significance of ideas, problems, assets, services, planning and finances.
- Explain when the Council will engage with residents.
- Describe the ways that residents can share their opinions with the Council, and how they can influence decision-making.
- Meet the requirements of Section 76AA of the Local Government Act 2002.
- Clarify Council decision making on consultation and engagement.

2. Scope

- This Policy applies to Council elected members and staff.
- It is applicable to any proposal presented to the Council or its Committees for a decision.
- The Policy does not affect any statutory requirement to undertake specific consultation and decision-making processes (e.g., under the Local Government Act 2002 or resource management legislation).

3. Glossary

Term	Description
Significance	Significance refers to how important something is and its impact on residents. The Council determines this by looking at how the District will be affected, the long-term consequences, and the associated costs. 'Significant' is also defined in section 5 of the Local Government Act 2002: *"In relation to any issue, proposal, decision, or other matter, means that the issue, proposal, decision, or other matter has a high degree of significance."*
Engagement	Engagement is the process by which the Council seeks input from the community. It ranges from informing residents to actively involving them in decision-making.
Consultation	**Consultation** is a more formal process than **engagement**, with principles outlined in section 82 of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA 2002). In certain cases, the Council is required to use the **Special Consultative Procedure** (section 83, LGA 2002), which includes specific legal requirements such as: • The type of information that must be provided to the public • The minimum length of the consultation period • The opportunity for the public to provide both written and oral submissions Once a consultation period closes, the process typically continues with: • Hearing oral submissions • Deliberating on the content of submissions and public feedback • Deciding whether to adopt the proposal (with or without changes), or not adopt it at all.
Annual Report	A document published yearly that summarises the Council's performance, including how much money it spent. This document allows residents to scrutinise the Council's performance against the goals set out in Long-term Plans and Annual Plans.
Assets	Assets are resources owned by the Council that have economic value and can provide future benefit for the community. **Strategic assets** are important assets that the Council needs to keep and maintain, in order to continue providing for the needs of the community. The Council's current strategic assets are detailed in Schedule 3 of this policy.
Planning	This refers to the Council's long-term planning. Planning is generally significant, and the community is asked to provide input. Important pieces of planning include: • **Long-term Plans** where the Council decides how to use its finances and how to deliver services. Completed every three years (next due in 2027).

	• **Annual Plans** which take place in the "in-between years" of Long-term plans. • The **District Plan** which sets the rules for the District around zoning, land-use and consenting.
Mana Whenua	Refers to iwi/hapū with ancestral connection, custodianship and guardianship over the lands in the Manawatū district. Mana whenua in a Te Ao Māori lense has distinct responsibilities of a particular area.
Tangata Whenua	A translation to "People of the land" and refers to the Māori people or Indigenous people of Aotearoa.

4. Community Participation

While the Council has a responsibility for determining how and when to engage with the community, we welcome and encourage the public to reach out to the Council themselves – there are several ways to do this:

Contacting the Council

- The public can contact Council staff for routine matters and queries:

  Email: public@mdc.govt.nz
  Phone: 06 323 0000
  Visit us: 135 Manchester Street, Feilding

- Antenno. The public can contact the Council via the Antenno app to report things that need fixing, provide feedback about services or make suggestions. Lodged queries include the GPS location of the submitter, which combined with the ability to send photos, allows the Council to respond quickly to reported issues.

Contacting the Mayor or Councillors

- The public have a right to contact their Mayor or Councillors and to request to meet with them, although routine matters may be referred back through to Council staff if appropriate. Contact details are published on our website.

Attending Meetings

- The Council holds regular meetings where the Mayor and Councillors make decisions. These are advertised on the Council's website. They are open for the public to attend, but may include a "public excluded" portion towards the end of the meeting to discuss anything confidential (e.g., to maintain the privacy of individuals, or to discuss commercially sensitive matters).

  Public Forum

The public can speak at a Council meeting if they send the Council a request at least 5 working days prior. The request should describe the subject the individual wants to talk about, and can be made by email (governance@mdc.govt.nz), or by calling Customer Services (06 323 0000).

Deputations

Deputations are when a group or individual wants to speak about an item at the specific time that it is being presented to the Council for consideration. Like public forums, requests should be made 5 working days prior to the meeting either by email or phone.

Petitions

- The public can present petitions to the Council requesting that they consider a topic or undertake some type of action. A petition must be fewer than 150 words and signed by at least 20 people. It should be sent to the Council at least 5 working days prior to a Council meeting.

Elections

- Elections are held every 3 years (due in 2025 and 2028) to elect our Mayor and Councillors. Anybody over 18 years of age who resides in the District, or owns a property in the District, is eligible to vote.

5. Significance

The significance of an issue is assessed based on a range of considerations, and while it requires careful judgement, the Council applies a consistent set of factors when making this assessment, including:

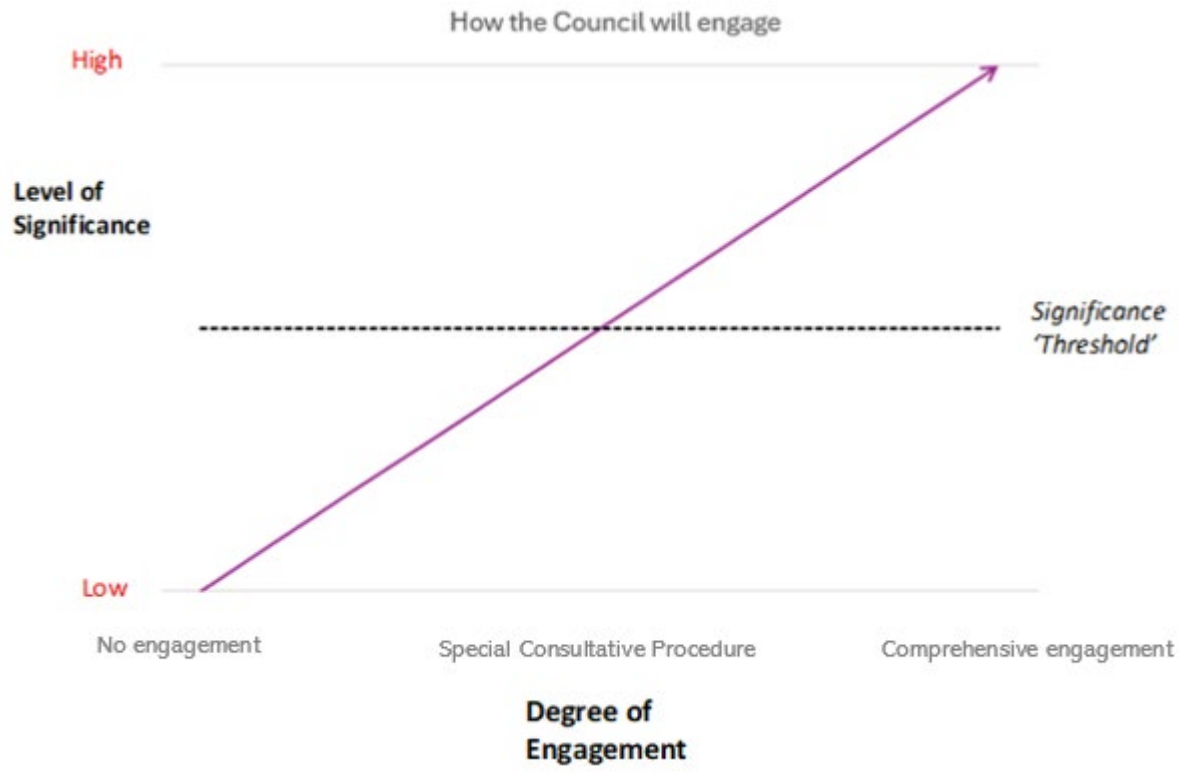
- The importance to the District as a whole
- Any disproportionate impacts on some parts of the community
- The amount of money involved (e.g., any impact on rates, debt or financial stability)
- The types of assets involved
- The effects on levels of service that the Council provides (including day-to-day services and longer-term projects)
- The permanence of the decision (e.g., can it be reversed at a later stage)
- Any effects on Council's relationships with partners and stakeholders
- Any inconsistencies with existing strategies, plans and policies

The way that the Council decides the significance of an issue is explained more fully in Schedule 1 of this policy.

6. Engagement

The Council has a responsibility to engage with the community when a topic is significant. As a general principle, it is also expected that the Council will engage with relevant people when an issue is not significant but may be of interest to specific groups.

The ways the Council will engage are described in Schedule 2 of this policy, but in general the more significant an issue is, the greater the level of engagement will be:



When the Council won't engage

There are extraordinary cases where the Council won't engage on an issue that is deemed to be significant, such as:

- In an emergency event response
- Where failure to make a decision urgently would risk harm to people or property, cause the Council to miss a substantial opportunity, or result in significant financial loss
- When physical alterations or repairs to strategic assets are required to remove immediate hazards and protect the health and safety of people

In these rare cases, the Council may notify the public of a decision made after the fact. If there are aspects of an issue yet to be resolved, or opportunity to readdress it at a later stage, the Council's engagement response will be reconsidered.

Special Consultative Procedure

The Local Government Act 2002 (section 82) sets out a legislative minimum for consultation. Consultations following the Special Consultative Procedure must:

- Include sufficient information to inform the public of the issue, and publicise this as widely as practical (e.g., newspapers, website, Council public facilities)
- Provide people with an opportunity to give comment (both in writing and in-person)
- Last for at least 1 month

There are several things that the Council is legally required to consult on, regardless of whether the Council would have otherwise determined them to be significant. For example, proposed plan changes and variations to the District Plan amendments must be consulted on in accordance with the Resource Management Act 1991, unless the changes are of a minor/technical nature or there is government direction which says consultation is not required.

7. The Community

While 'the community' is generally referred to in this policy as being everybody in the District, the Council also recognises that there are smaller communities within and across our boundaries that have unique interests.

Several major communities of note in our District (not a complete list) include:

Community	Description
Feilding community	The Feilding community is made up of residents living in our major District town. Projects in the town are of particular interest to this community, such as industrial and residential expansions. This group may also include commuter workers, visitors and tourists.
Village residents	There are several villages across the District and residents in these may have particular interests in roading, village growth and local facilities.
Rural community	The rural community in our District is closely tied to the land and natural resources, with a deep sense of stewardship and responsibility for the environment. This connection often shapes their way of life and influences their perspectives on land use, conservation, and local infrastructure needs.
Iwi, hapū and marae	In the District there are six mana whenua iwi and ten hapū on twelve marae (standing and non-standing). This makes for a complex and diverse cultural narrative but together they share a common affinity to the land and waterways.
Youth	Children and youth in the District are more likely to be impacted by education, transport, sport and recreational issues. Additionally, youth will naturally be impacted by Council decisions for a longer-period of time. The Council considers the long-term effect of its decisions on future residents and ratepayers.

Senior residents	Our senior residents may be more impacted by housing, health, and transport topics.
Business community	The ease of doing business in Feilding and the rural areas is important for ensuring the District's economic wellbeing.

Other communities that will have specific interests include whaikaha (those living with disabilities), the rainbow community (LGBTQI+), other ethnic communities, migrants, and transient workers.

Schedule 1: Determining Significance

The below considerations broadly sit on a continuum of low to high significance. A decision that involves two or more of these factors with greater significance is likely to be important and require some level of engagement with the community.

The Council's risk appetite informs the assessment of significance, particularly in areas such as service delivery, financial affordability, and cultural considerations. These factors are reflected in the table below:

Considerations	Description	Low significance	High significance
Importance to the District	• General sense of importance to the community • The degree of change from the status quo, and whether this is positive or negative • How wide-ranging the impacts will be	Issues that are routine and related to the inner workings of the Council	Controversial subjects, or decisions that will result in very noticeable changes from the present situation
Disproportionate impacts on select parts of the community	• Disproportionate impacts (positive or negative) can lead to perceptions of unfairness • Is it likely to be controversial	The impact is generalised relatively equally across different segments of the community	Decisions that specifically impact one or more community groups
The amount of money involved	• Is this likely to result in higher rates • Who does it benefit • Will it have any impact on Council's borrowing capacity	Low-cost decisions that are more related to the inner workings of Council	Costly decisions that will generate high community interest, and involve risk or opportunity
The types of assets involved	• Strategic assets vs other assets • Sentimental value of assets to the community • Cultural value of land to mana whenua	Low-value assets of limited cultural or social importance	Assets that see high community use or have sentimental value
Effects on levels of service	• Is it an increase or reduction in service • Will the change clash with the expectations of the community	No effects or minor increases to levels of service	Reductions or major increases in levels of service, particularly for publicly valued services
Permanence of the decision	• Will there be opportunity in the future to reconsider, perhaps with some level of community engagement • Is the funding of the decision equitable across existing and future ratepayers	Short-term decisions that do not involve much funding, or are subject to formal engagement	Irreversible decisions that have major impacts on the community, and commit future generations to higher debt
Effects on relationships	• Are there any risks around a decision having a negative impact on the Council's relationship with partners and stakeholders	No foreseen impact on Council's relationships with partners and stakeholders	There is a risk that Council's relationship with a partner or stakeholder could be damaged
Inconsistencies with existing strategies, plans and policies	• Is the decision likely to contradict other frameworks the Council has • What degree of change or uncertainty is there in this area	Decisions that do not significantly conflict with existing documentation	Decisions that substantially differ from existing strategies, plans and policies

Schedule 2: Engagement Methods*

Degree of Significance	← **Significance** →				
	Low Significance (not important)	**Limited Significance** (of interest to select people or groups)	**Significant (*i.e., threshold*)** (community-wide)	**High Significance** (issue of high interest to the community)	**Very high Significance** (critical issue)
Council's Method of Engagement	Provide **information**: Public notices Websites and/or emails Media releases Council agendas Community noticeboards Billboards / displays	Provide information, and **seek targeted feedback**: Brainstorms Surveys Events / roadshows Meeting with Council staff Hui	**Involve** the community: Formal proposals Hearings Public meetings Community committees Iwi / hapū Partner organisations	**Collaborate** with the community: External working groups Steering committees Continuous feedback loops Iterative developments	**Empower** the community to decide: Legislated processes Externally facilitated Binding referendums
Special Consultative Procedure?	No		Possible	Yes	
When will the Engagement happen?	After a decision has been made	After the issue has been discussed by the Council and Council decides to seek feedback from relevant people or groups	The Council will generally notify the public of the process and topic, before making a proposal for community-wide feedback	The Council will undertake some type of pre-engagement (i.e., prior to making a proposal), to better understand the community's viewpoints	The Council will provide a long lead-in time (typically several months), before facilitating a process that hands decision-making to the community
Example of issues (not an exhaustive list)	Water restrictions Road closures Emergency repair works New policies	Signage Leases and licences New minor facilities (e.g., gardens, toilets)	District Plan Annual Plan (major updates) Changes to level of services Repairs to major facilities	Long-term Plan Changes to strategic assets Key reductions to services Bylaws	Elections Polls Representation reviews

**based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Participation*

Schedule 3: Strategic Assets

The Local Government Act 2002 requires the Council to list its strategic assets in this Policy. These assets are essential for the Council to achieve outcomes important for the community's well-being, both now and in the future.

The Council considers its networks and other large assets as “complete single assets”, as it is the group of assets within these that deliver the service. This means that the Council will not follow the special consultative procedure if only part of a strategic asset is affected, unless that part substantially alters the level of service provided to the community.

Any change of ownership or control for a strategic asset as a whole must be provided for in the current Long-term Plan, and the Long-term Plan must involve engagement with the community (including the special consultative procedure).

Strategic Assets

- Parks, reserves and sports grounds
- Council administration building (135 Manchester Street, Feilding)
- Te Āhuru Mōwai (Community Hub Libraries)
- Recreational buildings including theatres, recreation complexes and high-priority halls
- Makino Aquatic Centre
- Roading network
- Stormwater network (urban)
- Land drainage networks (rural)
- Wastewater reticulation networks and treatment assets
- Water supply reticulation networks, treatment assets and storage facilities

Schedule 4: Engagement Principles

Principles *Council will reinforce the below principles when engaging with the community*	**Indicators** *Engagement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics*	**Outcomes** *Meeting these principles and indicators will be likely to result in the following outcomes*
Transparency The Council ensures decision-making is accessible and transparent, providing the community with timely information to participate effectively.	Council will: • Conduct engagement in a genuine effort to listen to, and consider with an open mind, community and stakeholder input • Present realistic and deliverable options for feedback • Ensure that engagement questions are objective (i.e., not leading) • Provide enough time and resources to ensure participants have been provided fair opportunity to understand the matter and contribute their views • Allow sufficient extra time in case other issues arise during an engagement process • Value contributions made by the public, acknowledging the time and effort they have given • Give timely feedback on the results of the public's input, and the subsequent decisions made • Respect and give weight to local knowledge	• Members of the public have a better understanding of the proposal or decision, and are able to participate effectively • Council has an enhanced understanding of community sentiment

Principles *Council will reinforce the below principles when engaging with the community*	**Indicators** *Engagement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics*	**Outcomes** *Meeting these principles and indicators will be likely to result in the following outcomes*
Building Relationships and Community Capacity Engagement is an opportunity for the Council to build on its long-term relationship with the community.	Council will: • Exercise a variety of engagement approaches (as set out in schedule 2) and make optimal use of these to build ongoing relationships with the community • Ensure that engagement opportunities are suited to the target audience, and provide ample opportunity for participants to present their views • Promote ways for the community to raise issues directly with the Council so that it is a two-way relationship (see section 3) • Identify opportunities to work in partnership with the community, to encourage a shared sense of ownership and participation • Ensure that community views and preferences are widely shared among Council members and officers • Engage early with partners and stakeholders in the development of plans, policies and decisions that affect them • Actively consider how to address and contribute to the needs and aspirations of our villages and marae	• Engagement processes improve awareness, elevate future participation and enhance the capacity of the community • A better decision or proposal will result from community participation • The decision or proposal will have greater community acceptance • Residents at our villages and marae will feel more supported in their growth aspirations
Inclusiveness and Equality Engagement and decision-making processes identify and encourage participation of the community in its full diversity. Historically excluded groups and individuals are included authentically in processes, activities, and decision-making.	Council will: • Fairly identify and distribute costs and benefits, to ensure comparable outcomes across the community • Explore creative and genuine ways of reaching community groups and individuals whose views are typically heard from the least often • Identify the specific ways that different demographics of the community may be affected by decision-making, and tailor the engagement process to amplify their views	• Council activities and decisions are responsive to the full range of needs and priorities in the community • Trust and respect for the Council increases among community members • Inclusivity and equality are increased by actively involving communities that may have been underrepresented in previous decision-making processes • New decisions and policies do not disadvantage

Principles *Council will reinforce the below principles when engaging with the community*	**Indicators** *Engagement processes that follow these principles commonly exhibit the following characteristics*	**Outcomes** *Meeting these principles and indicators will be likely to result in the following outcomes*
	• Provide multiple ways for people to participate, and remove as many physical and mental barriers to this as possible • Where required, invest in community capacity building to enable participation • Consider cultural norms and values when designing engagement techniques for Council decision-making and consultation • Use plain language and avoid jargon or acronyms wherever possible. If formal or legal language is necessary, provide a plain language summary document • Follow up with under-engaged groups to see how the process worked for their community members, and identify improvements for future engagement	historically underrepresented groups
Māori and Mana Whenua participation Council will actively provide opportunities for Māori and Mana Whenua to contribute to its decision-making processes. Joint Management Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding or other similar, high level agreements will be considered when engaging with Iwi and Māori.	Council will: • Work with iwi, hapū and marae to provide for the protection and enhancement of the natural environment (e.g., Mana Whakahaere) • Recognise and protect Māori and Mana Whenua rights and interests within the Manawatū District • Work with Māori to determine who the relevant spokespeople/parties/experts are for each specific matter • Seek guidance from Māori in the ways that they would like the Council to engage with them (e.g., Council-marae liaisons) • As required by Section 81 of the LGA 2002, consider how it might build the capability and capacity of active Māori engagement in Council decision-making (e.g., supporting Māori involvement in briefings and workshops)	• Treaty of Waitangi obligations are met (as per the LGA 2002, RMA 1991 and any other legislation relevant to local government) • Iwi and hapū relationships are maintained or enhanced