Significance and Engagement Policy

Purpose

This policy lets you know how you can be engaged in Greater Wellington's decision-making processes. It sets out Greater Wellington's general approach to identifying the significance of decisions and our approach to engaging with the community. This policy is also a guide for elected members and Greater Wellington staff as to the level and form of engagement that may be required from the start of a decision making process.

Our general approach

a. It is important for Greater Wellington to engage with the community so that we understand the views of the people who are likely to be affected by a decision.

b. Greater Wellington will consider the significance of a decision, and the level and type of engagement required, early in any decision making process, and review it if necessary over time.

c. The level of engagement with the community will reflect the significance of the decision.

Determining significance

d. Greater Wellington will determine the degree of significance on a case by case basis by considering the extent to which the matter has:

1. **Importance to the region** – the impact of the decision on the current and future wellbeing of the region

2. **Community interest** – the extent to which individuals, whanau, hapū and iwi, organisations, groups and sectors within the community are particularly interested in, or affected by, the decision and any history of public concern

3. **Consistency with existing Greater Wellington policy and strategy** – the extent of inconsistency and the likely impact

4. **Impacts on the Greater Wellington capability and capacity** – the impact on the objectives set out in the Financial Strategy, Long Term Plan and Annual Plan.

e. The criteria are of equal weight and will be considered as a whole: not in isolation.

f. Greater Wellington will consider a decision to be significant if it is assessed to:

- Have a high degree of significance (based on an assessment of the factors set out in d. above); or,
- It meets any one or more of the following criteria:
  - The proposal substantially affects Greater Wellington's ability to deliver the levels of service for any significant activity
  - The proposal results in the transfer of ownership or control of a strategic asset as defined by the Act or listed in this policy (see Schedule 1).

g. Council officers will use decision-making guidelines to assist them to provide advice to Greater Wellington on the significance of decisions[1].

Engagement

h. All consultation will be carried out in accordance with the consultation principles set out in the Local Government Act 2002 and the Community Engagement Approach set out in Schedule 2.

i. Greater Wellington will consult using the manner prescribed by law when this is required.

j. When not required by law to consult on a decision, the need for consultation and the appropriate level and form of engagement will be assessed and determined on a case by case basis.

k. In general, the more significant the issue the greater the need for community engagement.

l. Decisions that are consistent with Greater Wellington's Long Term Plan or another policy or plan that has been subject to consultation required by legislation will not usually require further engagement.

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[1] Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Decision Making processes and guidelines' 2013

m. Greater Wellington's officers will refer to the Community Engagement Approach set out in Schedule 2 and any relevant guidelines[2] to assist them to provide advice to the Greater Wellington on the level and form of engagement required for a decision, and community preferences.

n. Greater Wellington has appropriate processes in place for engaging with Māori.   This includes processes to:

- Support our partnerships with mana whenua, as set out in the Memorandum of Partnership 2013
- Fulfil statutory requirements to consult with mana whenua (such as under the Resource Management Act 1991)
- Enable taura here[3] to participate in issues of interest to the regional community[4].

Reporting

o. Every report to Greater Wellington (or its committees) that seeks a decision will include a statement of the significance of the decision and any engagement that is proposed or has been undertaken, assessed under this policy and any other relevant guidelines[5].

p. When Greater Wellington makes a decision that is significantly inconsistent with this policy, the steps identified in Section 80 of the Local Government Act 2002 will be followed.

Feedback

q. Greater Wellington will provide information about our final decision in a form appropriate to the significance of that decision and the level and form of the engagement already undertaken.

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[2] Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Decision Making processes and guidelines' 2013, Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Community Engagement Strategy' 2015, and Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Community Engagement Toolbox' 2015.

[3] Taura here, also known as matāwaka, refers to Māori who live in the Wellington region but are not affiliated to the iwi or groups holding mana whenua status here.

[4] Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Maori Partnership Framework' 2017

[5] Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Decision Making processes and guidelines' 2013, Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Community Engagement Strategy' 2015, and Greater Wellington Regional Council 'Community Engagement Toolbox' 2015.

Schedule 1 - Strategic Assets

Section 5 of the Local Government Act defines "strategic asset" as any of the following:

a. any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) by the local authority; and

b. any land or building owned by the local authority and required to maintain the local authority's capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and

c. any equity securities held by the local authority in—

    i.   a port company within the meaning of the Port Companies Act 1988:

    ii.   an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1966

Assets and groups of assets that Greater Wellington holds and considers to be strategic assets are:

* Greater Wellington's regional bulk water supply network, including storage lakes, treatment plants, pipelines and reservoirs
* Greater Wellington's flood protection assets on the region's major waterways, including stopbanks
* Greater Wellington's regional parks and forests network (including water supply catchments)
* Greater Wellington's plantation and reserve forest lands (taken as a whole)
* Greater Wellington's ownership interest in CentrePort Limited (via the WRC Holdings Group)
* Greater Wellington's harbour navigation aids and communications systems (taken as a whole)
* Greater Wellington's ownership, via the WRC Holdings Group, of rail rolling stock and other rail infrastructure required for the operation of the passenger rail system in the region (taken as a whole).

In addition, Greater Wellington is a joint settlor with the Wellington City Council of the Wellington Regional Stadium Trust and although it has no ownership interest in the Stadium Trust, Greater Wellington considers the stadium to be a strategic asset of the region.

A decision to transfer ownership or control of a strategic asset cannot be made unless it has first been included in the Long-Term Plan (and in a statement of proposal relating to the Long-Term Plan).

Acquisition or disposal of a small component of a strategic asset will not trigger this provision, unless it is considered that the component is an integral part of the strategic asset and that its acquisition or disposal would substantially affect the operation of the strategic asset.

Schedule 2 – Community Engagement Approach

Once we have determined the level of significance of a decision, there are two important steps in deciding how we will engage with the community on an issue.

1.   Establish the level of engagement required, and then

2.   Consider the methods for engagement

Step 1 – Establish the level of engagement required

To ensure that we engage with communities at the right level, we work with an engagement spectrum[6]. Differing levels of engagement may be required during the varying phases of decision-making on an issue, and for different stakeholders. In general, the more significance, the greater the need for community engagement.

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[6] Adapted from work of the International Association for Public Participation

This spectrum has an increasing level of public participation: from 'informing' through to 'collaborating'. 'Informing' stakeholders is a one way process of providing information, whereas 'collaboration' with stakeholders implies an increase in public participation in, and impact on, decision making.
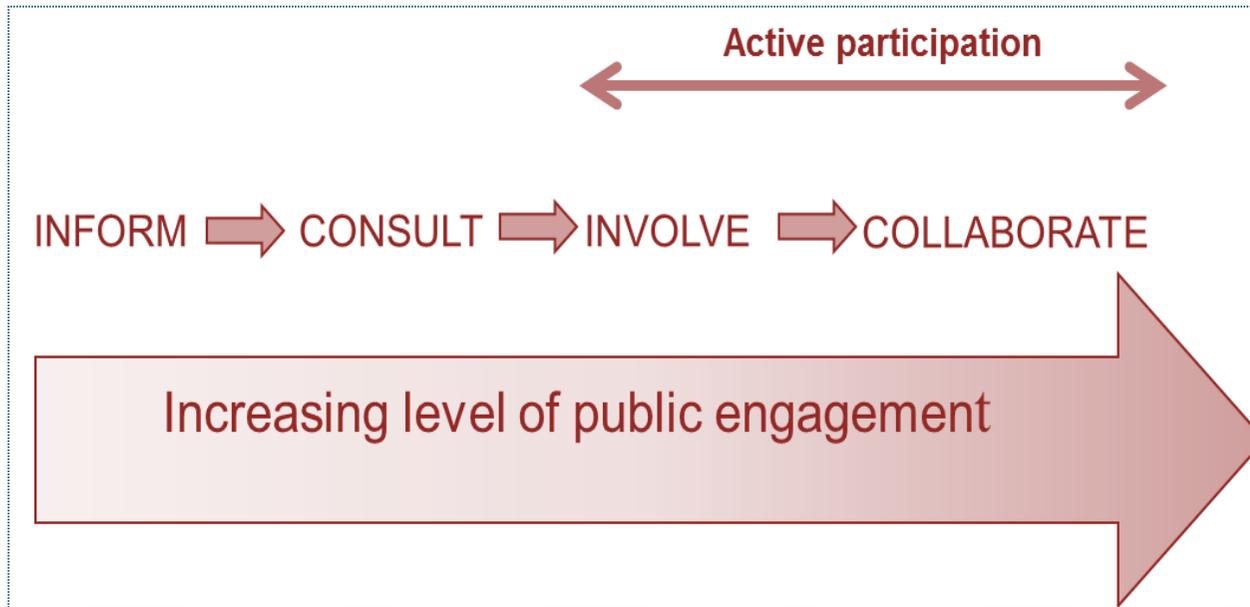
We will consider how much engagement is necessary to understand the community's views before a decision is made, and the extent to which engagement can influence the decision (in some cases options may be limited by legislation or other factors).

Using the engagement spectrum as a basis, we will consider the levels of engagement depending on whether or not:

1.   A decision is of no significance and there may be a very small group of people affected by, or with an interest in the decision. They may need to be informed about the issue or decision.

2.   The decision is important to only a relatively small group of people or is of low impact to many. They should be **informed** about the issue, alternatives and options and may be **consulted** so that their views, aspirations, and any alternative options are understood and considered.

3. The decision is important to a small group of affected people, and may be of interest to the wider community. They may be **informed, consulted** and/or **involved** so that they can contribute to analysis, options, or decisions.

4. For decisions of higher significance, the council may elect to **collaborate,** or partner, with a community in any aspect of a decision including the development of alternative options and identification of preferred solutions. This is more likely to occur where there is a distinct group of people particularly affected or interested.

The table below provides information on the characteristics of the different levels of engagement and examples of when we might use them:

Table 1: Characteristics and examples of different levels of engagement

Inform	Consult	Active participation	
		Involve	Collaborate
Characteristics One-way communication providing information that is accurate, relevant and easy to understand about something that is going to happen or has happened.	**Characteristics** Two-way process designed to obtain public feedback about issues and proposals initiated and defined by GWRC to inform decision-making.	**Characteristics** Two-way participatory process which involves working directly with community members. Participants have opportunity to actively identify issues and options to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision-making.	**Characteristics** Working in partnership with the community in each aspect of the decision-making process, to ensure understanding of all issues and interests and develop alternatives and identify preferred solutions.
Example – *Issue*: **Household emergency plans and preparedness** *Tools*: **Leaflets, local newspaper articles, website information** *When*: **Following the development of information and guidance**	**Example –** *Issue:* Annual Plan *Tools:* Submissions and hearings process *When:* When a draft Plan has been developed	**Example –** *Issue:* Parks Network Plan amendments *Tools:* Focus groups and online discussion forum to identify issues and develop options. *When:* At an early stage, prior to a draft plan being developed.	**Example –** *Issue*: Regional Plan development *Tools*: Whaitua Committee approach – form of community advisory committees *When*: Regularly throughout the process

Step 2 – Consider the methods for engagement

Once we have established the right level of engagement on an issue, we can consider how we will engage with the community.

How does the community want to engage with Council?

In October 2017 we asked members of the community about how they would like to engage with Greater Wellington[7]. They told us that engaging online was the most preferred option for both major and smaller initiatives/decisions. This preference was regardless of age, gender, ratepayer status and location within the region.

Respondents were asked to rank how they preferred to be consulted by Greater Wellington Regional Council on initiatives and decisions.

Preferences ranked from most preferred to least were:

1. Participating in online surveys, discussion forums, or other online tools

2. Attending information sessions with experts

3. Blog or email notification

4. Completing a submission, followed by an option for a meeting

5. Viewing public meetings or information sessions live via the internet and participating online

6. Attending local community meetings

7. Participating in focus groups

8. Participating in co-design activities

9. Participating in community committees

10. Through an App

11. Attending public meetings

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[7] We asked members of our Citizen's Panel to answer questions about how they prefer to engage with Council.

We will have regard to these preferences when considering the appropriate engagement method for a particular matter.

Possible methods for engagement

We have many options for how we communicate and work with the community. The council will select the methods that it considers appropriate after considering criteria such as:

- Who is affected
- The significance of the matter
- The community's preferences for engagement
- What information already exists on community views
- The circumstances surrounding the decision

We will ensure the community is provided with all the information required to engage effectively and make an informed decision. When we engage we will let people know:

- What is proposed
- Why
- What options we have
- Our preferred option and why
- Costs and rating impact if any
- How the community can have a say
- The timeframe and process
- How we will communicate the outcome

Here are some examples of the differing levels of engagement and the types of tools and methods that may be used at each level of engagement.

Table 2: Examples of possible engagement methods

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT METHODS	SIGNIFICANCE		
	Low	Med	High

1. Informing

- Posters, newsletters, postcards, advertising and publications
- Local newspaper press releases, publications, radio and TV interviews
- Public meetings, open days, exhibitions
- Website or email updates
- Social media updates via Twitter, Facebook, podcasts

2. Consulting

- Submissions and hearings processes
- Surveys, feedback form, polls
- Interviews
- Citizens panels, focus groups
- Public meetings or surgeries

3. Involving

- Meetings and workshops with interested parties to identify issues and shape options
- Public visioning events, ideas competitions
- Consensus conference (questioning experts before making recommendation)
- Workshops, roadshows, world café
- Online discussion forums
- Citizens' juries and panels

4. Collaborating

- Community advisory committee
- Consensus building and participatory decision making forums

Schedule 3 – Definitions

Community	A group of people living in the same place or having a particular interest in common. This includes: • Communities of place (towns, suburbs, neighbourhoods) • Communities of interest (special interest groups).
Decisions	Refers to all the decisions made by or on behalf of Council including those made by officers under delegation.
Engagement	Community engagement is the process of ensuring that communities of people within our region are able to be involved through a range of mechanisms in the planning, development and delivery of programmes and services affecting their communities. It includes the provision of timely, accessible and complete information; appropriate forms of consultation; and enabling communities to actively participate in influencing decision-making and service delivery where applicable.
Significance	As defined in Section 5 of the LGA2002 "in relation to any issue, proposal, decision, or other matter that concerns or is before a local authority, means the degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by the local authority, in terms of its likely impact on, and likely consequences for,— a) the district or region: b) any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in, the issue, proposal, decision, or matter: c) the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so

Significant	Significant, 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
Strategic asset	As defined in Section 5 of the LGA2002 "in relation to the assets held by a local authority, means an asset or group of assets that the local authority needs to retain if the local authority is to maintain the local authority's capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that the local authority determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community; and includes— a) any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) by the local authority; and b) any land or building owned by the local authority and required to maintain the local authority's capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and c) any equity securities held by the local authority in— (i) a port company within the meaning of the Port Companies Act 1988: (ii) an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1966"