1. **Purpose**

The *Community Engagement Strategy* outlines Council’s commitment to provide the community with genuine opportunities to contribute to and inform projects, strategies, services and decisions that affect them.

The strategy guides the delivery of community engagement processes across the organisation to better inform decisions in the planning of services, setting budgets and developing policies and strategies.

The strategy is based on the principle that community engagement is the foundation of good decision-making, and is mutually beneficial to the community and Council.

2. **Definitions**

**Community**

Means individuals and groups of people, stakeholders, interest groups and citizen groups. A community may be a geographic location (community of place), a community of similar interest (community of practice) or a community of affiliation or identity (such as industry or sporting club).

**Community engagement**

Means a planned process that aims to work with customers, stakeholders and/or communities to shape decisions and actions in relation to a problem, opportunity or outcome (*IAP2 2015*).

Community engagement may also be referred to as public participation, consultation and stakeholder engagement.

**Council**

Means Casey City Council, being a body corporate constituted as a municipal Council under the *Local Government Act 1989*.

**Councillors**

Means the individuals holding the office of a member of Casey City Council.

**Council officer**

Means the Chief Executive Officer and staff of Council appointed by the Chief Executive Officer.

**Customer/s**

Means an individual, business or organisation that uses Council services.
Decision

Means a conclusion or resolution reached after consideration. Decisions can take many forms and in this strategy it is used to include activities such as projects, service design/delivery, and policy development.

Project

Means a planned undertaking that builds, enhances and/or maintains Council assets or enhances Council services in order to achieve a desired outcome, within a defined scope.

Stakeholder/s

Defined as individuals, group of individuals, organisations or political entities with a specific stake in the outcome of a decision or the impact of a strategy, project or proposition.

IAP2

The International Association for Public Participation.

Inform

A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation provides the community with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.

Consult

A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation seeks community feedback on alternatives, drafts or proposals.

Involve

A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation works with the community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed.

Collaborate

A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation partners with the community through the whole process of making a decision.

Empower

A level of community engagement in the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation in which an organisation shares some or all of its authority to make decisions with the community.

3. Scope

This strategy applies to all City of Casey employees, Councillors, volunteers, consultants and contractors associated with Council.

The strategy provides direction for practice through the lifecycle of community engagement from designing, to planning, managing, reporting and learning (including monitoring and evaluating) and is supported by an operational manual for staff.
4. Context

Community engagement at City of Casey is influenced by the following factors:

- A growing expectation by stakeholders, the community and customers that they will have an opportunity to influence government decisions that affect their lives.
- **Council’s commitment to continuously** improve the services, infrastructure and programs it provides to support the vibrant, growing Casey community.
- Best practice industry standards as outlined by IAP2 in their Spectrum of Public Participation, and exhibited by government bodies, authorities and private enterprise.
- Contemporary communication channels, including digital and social media, audience diversity and expectations.
- **Council’s commitment to be a customer focused organisation;** using human-centred design and user experience models (UX) to help design new services and improve existing services for optimum customer experience.
- Approaches to leadership, governance and decision-making that require greater public participation, including:
  - Local Government Rate Capping and Variation Framework (Victorian Essential Services Commission) requirements for community engagement for rate increases above the CPI cap.
  - An industry-recognised Quality Assurance Standard for Community and Stakeholder Engagement developed by the IAP2 (2015) which provides a reference point for government organisations.

In some instances, City of Casey is legislatively and/or legally required to engage with the community. In these cases, City of Casey will treat the legally required level of community engagement as the minimum standard.

Delivery of community engagement beyond legally required levels will depend on the decision to be made (or project/service to be delivered), the community’s interest to participate, the need to understand the community’s view, and the opportunity for the community to influence the decision.

Community engagement is required under the following relevant legislation:

- Local Government Act 1989
- Road Management Act 2004
- Planning and Environment Act 2007
- Health and Wellbeing Act 2008
- Commission for Children and Young People Child Safe Standards

5. Strategy

5.1. Commitment to community engagement

City of Casey is committed to engaging communities in a meaningful way on decisions that impact and/or interest them. When Council actively engages with its communities, it will:
» Provide opportunities that are accessible and support participation of the entire community, including children, youth, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, people with a disability, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) communities.

» Undertake initiatives to enable the participation of people potentially affected by a decision and endeavour to reduce any barriers that prevent their participation.

» Implement flexible processes with a variety of community engagement tools and techniques to ensure maximum participation relevant to the project.

» Undertake community engagement at an appropriate time in the decision-making or project planning process, so that project or decision outcomes can be influenced by the engagement.

» Resource and allocate time to develop community engagement processes.

» Be transparent with the community about how their participation influenced the decision or project, by reporting back and closing the loop with them.

» Undertake efficient community engagement by working together across the organisation to reduce the duplication of community engagement activities.

» Monitor and evaluate City of Casey’s community engagement processes to continuously improve community engagement practice.

» Evaluate this strategy and Council’s community engagement practice.

City of Casey commits to adhering to the IAP2 Code of Ethics for community engagement practitioners, which provides the following set of researched and tested principles:

» **Purpose**: we support community engagement as a process to make better decisions that incorporate the interests and concerns of all affected stakeholders and meet the needs of City of Casey.

» **Role of community engagement practitioners**: we will enhance the community’s participation in the decision-making process and assist decision-makers in being responsive to the community’s concerns and suggestions.

» **Trust**: we will undertake and encourage actions that build trust and credibility for the process and among all the participants.

» **Defining the community’s role**: we will carefully consider and accurately portray the community’s role in the decision-making process.

» **Openness**: we will encourage the disclosure of all information relevant to the community’s understanding and evaluation of a decision.

» **Access to the process**: we will ensure that stakeholders have fair and equal access to the community engagement process and the opportunity to influence decisions.

» **Respect for communities**: we will avoid strategies that risk polarising community interest or that appear to ‘divide and conquer’.

» **Advocacy**: we will advocate for the community engagement process and will not advocate for a particular interest, party or project outcome.

» **Commitments**: we will ensure that all commitments made to the community, including those by decision-makers, are made in good faith.

» **Support of the practice**: we will mentor new practitioners in the field and educate decision-makers and the community about the value and use of community engagement.
5.2. **Strategic Themes**

Based on consultation, research and expert advice; four key strategic themes have been developed to create a culture of leading practice in community engagement at City of Casey.

These themes are supported by strategic actions aimed at enhancing the way City of Casey undertakes community engagement.

**Strategic Theme 1: Staff have the capacity and skills to undertake community engagement in-line with the strategy**

**Strategic Theme 2: City of Casey has systems and tools in place to support leading practice in community engagement**

**Strategic Theme 3: Community engagement findings and processes are a standard part of decision-making at City of Casey**

**Strategic Theme 4: Community engagement effectively results in better decisions and service provision to the community**

5.3. **Approach to community engagement**

   **i When Council will engage the community**

City of Casey will engage with the community when:

- Council resolves formally to engage
- There is a requirement to understand the communities’ expectations, needs and priorities
- Planning for the development of Council’s Annual Budget and Council Plan
- A decision or plan will substantially impact the community and there is some part of the decision or plan that is negotiable
- Community advocates have expressed an interest or could be interested in a plan or decision that is negotiable
- Community input can enhance decision-making, project outcomes or future opportunities
- There is legislation, policy or agreement requiring community engagement.

   **ii How Council will engage the community**

Community engagement at City of Casey is a purposeful and planned process.

An operational manual has been developed and Council departments undertaking community engagement will create engagement plans in-line with this manual in consultation with the Communications Department.

The design of community engagement is undertaken early in a project to allow for a timely and well-planned process.
Community engagement plans address the full lifecycle of practice including the phases and steps shown in the diagram below (adapted from the Design, Plan, Manage model, IAP2 2015):

1. **Scope phase**
The project is defined and the scope outlined including the project negotiables for engagement. Stakeholders are identified.

2. **Plan phase**
The purpose of the engagement is set, stakeholders are analysed and appropriate engagement methods chosen.

3. **Action phase**
The engagement plan is implemented, with stakeholder relationships and participation monitored.

4. **Learn phase**
The engagement data is collated and analysed, with results reported back to the community to 'close the loop'. The plan is evaluated and lessons learnt documented.

The following tools and channels provide examples of the methods Council could use when engaging with the community.

<p>| Consult - Council will keep the community informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. | Surveys |
| - Online forums on Council’s engagement platform, Casey Conversations | » Surveys |
| - Face to face at community engagement events | » Online forums on Council’s engagement platform, Casey Conversations |
| - Drop-in information sessions | » Face to face at community engagement events |
| - Pop-up stands at community spaces | » Drop-in information sessions |
| - Feedback and submission forms | » Pop-up stands at community spaces |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involve -</th>
<th>Collaborate -</th>
<th>Empower -</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Council will work with the community to ensure that their concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.</td>
<td>Council will work together with the community to formulate solutions and incorporate their advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.</td>
<td>Council will implement what the community decide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Workshops</td>
<td>» Workshops</td>
<td>» Citizens’ jury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Focus groups</td>
<td>» Focus groups</td>
<td>» Community Panels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>» Community panels</td>
<td>» Community panels</td>
<td>» Some reference groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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*Source: Adapted from International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) Public Participation Spectrum 2014*

### 5.4. Evaluation

Evaluation and learning is part of community engagement practice at City of Casey and is completed at two different levels:

**i. Community engagement project evaluation**

Guided by an Engagement Project Evaluation Framework, project teams are responsible for applying the framework at each phase of their community engagement plan to ensure that there is a consistent approach to the evaluation of, and reporting on, community engagement plans.

This will help to both provide evidence that good practice community engagement is being delivered at the project level, and reinforce a culture of continuous improvement.

**ii. Community Engagement Strategy evaluation**

The Community Engagement Strategy Evaluation Framework will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy and report on the progress of the strategy.
6. **Relationship with other Council policies**

   The Council’s *Project Management Framework* identifies trigger points for the design and planning of community engagement at the City of Casey.

   The community engagement principles outlined in this strategy are aligned with the *Customer Focus Strategy* and *Diversity, Access and Inclusion Policy*.

7. **Administrative updates**

   It is recognised that, from time to time, circumstances may change leading to the need for minor administrative changes to this document. Where an update does not materially alter this document, such a change may be made administratively. Examples include a change to the name of a Council department, a change to the name of a Federal or State Government department, and a minor update to legislation which does not have a material impact. However, any change or update which materially alters this document must be by resolution of Council.

8. **Review**

   The strategy will be reviewed every two years with the next review scheduled for 30 September 2019.