



Significance and Engagement Policy 2023

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2024-34 Long-term Plan Project Team

Front Cover Photo
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SIGNIFICANCE AND ENGAGEMENT POLICY 2023

1 Purpose

- a) To provide clear guidance on determining the significance of matters for Council decision.
- b) To inform the community about how they can expect to be engaged in Council's decision-making processes.

2 Background

Section 76AA of The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires Council to have a policy on significance and engagement that sets out:

- the general approach it takes to determining the significance of an issue or decision,
- the criteria and procedures used for determining significance, and
- what the community can expect in terms of consultation and engagement on matters with different degrees of significance.

3 What does "significance" mean?

'Significance' can be viewed as a continuum, ranging from a very low level of significance (where a decision is 'not important') to a very high level (where a decision is 'critical'). At some point in the continuum, the degree of significance becomes high enough that the matter is considered 'significant'.

The LGA defines significance (in the context of local government decision making) as "the degree of importance of the issue...in terms of its likely impact on, and likely consequences for,—

- a) the current and future social, economic, environmental, or cultural well-being of 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."

The LGA states that an issue is "significant" if it has a "high degree of significance.

4 Assessing Significance

a) Approach

Assessing the level of significance of a decision is essentially a matter of judgment.

Council will consider each proposal or decision on a case-by-case basis to determine its level of significance, by applying the criteria set out in this policy and following the procedures set out below. (See also Appendix 1 – Implementation of this Significance and Engagement Policy.)

b) Criteria

Council will consider the following criteria in reaching a decision as to the significance of matters that are not required to have a special consultative procedure by the LGA.

The criteria will be considered together – a proposal that meets one of the criteria in isolation will not necessarily be significant.

- I. The number of people who may be affected
- II. The potential impact on any affected person or persons
- III. Whether the matter has a history of wide public interest in the region, or is likely to generate considerable public interest
- IV. Whether the decision is permanent or can be reversed, such as the potential impact on the environment
- V. Whether the decision involves a strategic asset
- VI. Whether the decision is likely to be of high interest to Māori (see also section 5(c))
- VII. The impact the decision will have on Council's resources and/or future direction
- VIII. Financial consequences to Council
- IX. Alignment with Council's vision and community outcomes
- X. Alignment with Council's policies and plans

c) Inconsistent decisions

When a decision is made that is, or could have consequences that are significantly inconsistent with this policy, Section 80 of the LGA applies. This provision requires that the inconsistency, the reasons for it, and any intention Horizons may have to amend the policy to accommodate it, be set out when making the decision.

5 Engagement

a) Statutory Requirements

The LGA sets out several requirements of councils in relation to community engagement:

- Section 78 – That Council consider the views of those likely to be affected by or to have an interest in its decisions.
- Section 82 – That Council gives effect to the principles of consultation. These principles relate to ensuring that the community has the information, and the opportunity, to engage in Council's decision making processes, and that those processes are transparent.
- Section 83 - Special Consultative Procedure (SCP). In certain cases, the Act requires councils to use a prescribed process for consultation. This process relates to the presentation the consultation information.

b) Approach

In general, decisions and proposals assessed as significant will be part of statutory long-term planning processes and will be assessed against Horizons' strategic objectives. Therefore, community engagement on these matters will usually be included within the Long term Plan's special consultative procedure.

For matters that are assessed as being significant, Council will use one or a combination of engagement methods (see Appendix 2: Levels and methods of engagement - IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum). Generally, the more significant or material the impact or consequences of a decision or proposal, the more formal or extensive the engagement process is likely to be.

The choice of engagement methods will depend on a range of factors including:

- The size, location and characteristics of the communities that will be affected by the decision
- The communities' preferences for engagement
- What is already recorded about the communities' views and preferences
- The degree of significance the matter is assessed as having
- The criteria that were relevant in that assessment
- The circumstances in which the decision is to be taken or the issue arose
- The cost of the method relative to the significance of the matter, and
- Whether there is good reason under the provisions of Part 1 of the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987 to withhold information.

Matters assessed as low significance will be decided by Council or delegated to Horizons' officers or a Council committee. Communities or affected individuals will be informed about these decisions and their implementation either directly, through existing communications channels, or in some cases publications like the Annual Report.

c) Engagement with Māori

The Local Government Act 2002 requires us to provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to our decision-making processes. To meet this, we will:

- recognise the enduring presence, aspirations, and cultural practices of Māori as kaitiaki in the region,
- actively consider the recognition and protection of Māori rights and interests within the region and how we contribute to the needs and aspirations of Māori,
- where a decision relates to land or a body of water, take into account the relationship of Māori, and their culture and traditions with their ancestral land, water, sites, wāhi tapu, valued flora and fauna, and other taonga,
- recognise the entities and governance frameworks established by treaty settlement legislation and the intent of that legislation,
- establish and maintain processes to provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to our decision making processes, including collaborative and partnership approaches where appropriate,
- support Māori to fully engage with us, for example through capability and capacity building,
- build ongoing relationships with Māori through a range of approaches that enables:
 - early engagement with Māori in the development of appropriate plans and policies,
 - Māori to guide how they want to engage with the council.

For the purposes of this policy, 'Māori' will usually refer to mana whenua and other iwi with a recognised interest in an area.

d) When Council may choose not to consult

There are times when Council will not normally consult with the community because the issue is routine, operational or because there is an emergency. These may include:

- Emergency management activities, such as during a state of emergency

- Decisions that have to be made urgently where it is not reasonably practicable to consult
- Decisions to act where it is necessary to comply with the law
- Decisions that are confidential or commercially sensitive as prescribed under the Local Government Official Information Act 1987
- Organisational decisions (such as staff changes and operational matters) that do not materially reduce a level of service
- Decisions with regard to regulatory and enforcement activities
- Procurement and tendering processes
- Standards set by National Policy Statements
- Any decisions that are made by delegation or sub delegation to officers
- Where the matter has already been addressed by Council's policies or plans, which have previously been the subject of consultation
- Where there is not yet enough of an evidence-base to justify meaningful engagement
- Minor administrative changes to documents

Some decisions made by Council are bound by legislation. In these situations, Council must follow the law and cannot use a flexible consultation process with the community.

6 Strategic Assets

Strategic assets are defined in the LGA as being those that need to be retained to maintain a local authority's capacity to achieve the outcomes it determines are important to the current or future wellbeing of its communities. The definition specifies that some assets, such as equity securities in a port company, are strategic.

The assets Horizons considers to be strategic are:

- I. 23.08 per cent shareholding in CentrePort Ltd, and
- II. River and drainage schemes taken as a whole but not any specific part of the asset group

Horizons' holdings include other assets that do not meet the definition of 'strategic asset' in the LGA. Decisions regarding those assets may be considered significant.

7 Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least every three years, or as required.

8 Attachments

8.1 Attachment 1 – Implementation of the Significance and Engagement Policy

1. Internal guidance on making a significance assessment is available to Council officers.
2. The relevant Council officer will make an assessment of significance (in accordance with this policy) on the matter for consideration.
3. Once an assessment has been made, this will be reviewed by the Executive Team.
4. Reports to Council and standing committees include a section on the significance of the matters raised in that report. An explanation of the significance assessment will be provided in the report.
5. If the decision or proposal is considered to be significant, the report will also include recommendations for engagement in accordance with section 5 of this policy.
6. The recommended resolutions in the report will ask the Council (or committee) to
 - a. confirm or modify the significance assessment, and
 - b. confirm or modify the engagement recommendations.

8.2 Attachment 2 – Levels and methods of engagement - IAP2¹ Public Participation Spectrum

Level	Inform	Seek Feedback	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Goal	To provide affected communities with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives or solutions.	To obtain input or feedback from affected communities about our analysis, alternatives and/or proposed decisions.	To work directly with affected communities throughout the process to ensure their issues and concerns are consistently understood and fully considered in Council's decision making.	To work closely with affected communities to develop alternatives and recommend preferred solutions.	To place final decision making in the hands of affected communities.
Promise to the Community	Council will keep you informed and advise you of the decisions it makes.	Council will keep you informed and listen to and acknowledge your concerns. Council will provide reasons for the decision making.	Council will work with you to ensure your concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed. Council will provide feedback about how your input influenced the decisions it made.	Council will work with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions it makes to the maximum possible extent.	Council will implement what you decide.
Types of issues we have used this for	- Annual Report - Annual Plan	- Long-term Plan - Environmental issues (Plan Change 2 to the One Plan) - Public transport - Flood control and drainage	Our Freshwater Future	- Te Kōpuka nā te Awa Tupua - Ngā Wai Tōtā	Council elections
Tools we might use	- Websites - Information flyer - Public notices - Social media - Public signage	- Formal submissions and hearings - Social media and online tools - Surveys - Focus groups	- Hui - Workshops	- External working groups (with community experts) - Co-governance forums	- Council elections - Binding referendums
When Communities can expect to be involved	Council would generally advise the community once a decision has been made.	Council would advise the community once a draft decision is made and would generally provide the community with up to four weeks to participate and respond.	Council would generally provide the community with greater lead-in time to allow them time to be involved in the process.	Council would generally involve the community at the start to scope the issue, again after information has been collected and again when options are being considered.	Council would generally provide the community with a greater lead-in time, to allow them time to be involved in the process, typically a month or more.

¹ International Association for Public Participation



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