

Significance and Engagement Policy

Department:	Community Vision / Business Support
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Purpose:

To set out Council's general approach to determining the significance of proposals and decisions, including any criteria or procedures used in assessing significance.

To outline how Council responds to community preferences about engagement and engages with communities.

Principles and objectives:

The core objectives of this policy are:

- To reflect Council's commitment to empower the community to understand and participate to align decision making with community needs now and into the future.
- For Council and communities to work together to deliver a joint outcome and create stronger and more connected communities.
- To partner with mana whenua and make mātauraka Kāi Tahu an integral part of decision-making.
- To ensure the community is adequately engaged and informed about Council activities.
- To ensure Council complies with all relevant legislation.
- To provide practical guidance and consideration on how significance is determined.
- To ensure appropriate significance is given to climate related issues.

Scope:

The Policy applies to all Council activities and functions, as reflected in the Local Government Act.

Definitions:

Term	Definition
The Act	Local Government Act 2002
Significance	As defined by the Local Government Act, the degree of importance of an issue, proposal, decision or matter as assessed by Council taking into account the likely impact on, and consequences for:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current and future social, economic, environmental, or cultural well-being of Central Otago • Those likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in, the issue, proposal, decision or matter • Council’s capacity to perform its role and the costs (financial and otherwise) of doing so.
Strategic assets	<p>Strategic assets are essential to the continued delivery of council services or activities.</p> <p>Council has chosen to group strategic assets into relevant networks. Individual assets have also been listed where they are thought to be of critical strategic significance:</p> <p>Council considers strategic assets to be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The roading network as a whole • The three waters network as a whole • Council’s waste assets portfolio as a whole • Council’s portfolio of reserves as a whole • Council owned and administered pools as a whole • Alexandra Airport • Cromwell Airport • Molyneux Stadium • Council’s portfolio of elderly persons housing as a whole • Council’s portfolio of cemeteries as a whole • Council’s portfolio of libraries as a whole

Policy:

Central Otago District Council follows a four-step process to significance and engagement:



Determine significance

Significance measures the importance of an issue, proposal, asset, decision, or activity.

All governance decisions are evaluated for significance at each step, with all decision-making reports including the significance.

Significance indicators

The following factors are considered when determining the level of significance. The greater the cumulative impact across these factors, the more significant a decision will be.

- The number of people affected, the degree to which they are affected, and the likely impact of a proposal or decision
- Whether this type of matter is likely to generate wide public interest within a community board area or the district
- The impact of the proposal or decision on Council's ability to deliver on actions or perform any statutory responsibility
- The impact of the proposal or decision on intended service levels for a group of activities, including the start or stop of any group of activities
- The degree to which a proposal or decision can be reversed should circumstances warrant
- The degree to which a proposal or decision is likely to increase emissions or otherwise have a climate impact; or addresses an aspect of climate adaptation.
- The ownership or function of a strategic asset.
- A substantial variation of a budgeted spend toward a particular project or activity.

Responding to significance

All projects and reports for decision making include a statement on the significance of a decision. Where a matter is considered to have a high degree of significance, reporting includes statements about how this policy and the relevant portions of the Act are met.

Where failure to make a decision urgently could, in Council's opinion, result in unreasonable or significant damage to property, or risk to people's health and safety, it may, in accordance with the Act, make a decision that is significantly inconsistent with this policy.

Level of engagement

Once significance is determined, the level of engagement to be undertaken (if any) is decided.

Council has a broad and ongoing process of sharing information with the community and seeking feedback on an ongoing basis, for the purpose of continually increasing community awareness, as well as access and involvement in the process of decision making.

Consultation is undertaken on a more specific basis.

Māori participation

The Act requires local authorities to facilitate participation by Māori in local decision-making processes. For the Council, these legislative requirements are considered a bottom line. Council aspire to go beyond statutory requirements to ensure meaningful engagement with mana whenua which recognises the principles of partnership of the Treaty of Waitangi. This also recognises the value that engagement with mana whenua adds through the sharing of their knowledge and wisdom.

Informal and formal processes

Council meets all legislated consultative requirements, including those set out in the Act and other legislation.

Consultation processes invites and encourages all those who will be affected by or have an interest in the matter being discussed to present their views to Council.

Some projects and activities will require Council to use a special consultative procedure, as set out in section 83 of the Act. The special consultative procedure requires Council to issue and widely distribute a statement of proposal which will be open for consultation for at least one month, plus a description of how people interested in the project can present their views.

Council's Long-term Plan is an example of a process that must undergo a special consultative procedure in its development. These are the decisions that involve:

- Significantly altering the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or behalf of the Council
- Transferring the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council.

Council is actively undertaking initiatives to increase the reach of our engagement, including seeking ways to make formal consultation more relevant and accessible to the community.

Deciding not to engage

Council may choose not engage with the community on a matter that is routine, operational, or because there is an emergency. Examples include:

- Matters where Council already has a sound understanding of the views and preferences of those likely to be affected or interested in the matter – including issues that have previously been consulted on or addressed by the Council’s strategies or plans; or matters where Council has engaged within the last 3 years.
- Situations where there is a need for confidentiality or commercial sensitivity.
- Emergency management activities.
- Organisational decisions that do not materially change a level of service.
- Matters where the cost of engagement is likely to outweigh the benefit.
- Issues where an immediate or quick response is needed or it is not practical to engage.
- Any business-as-usual works relating to the operation or maintenance of an asset.

When this takes place, Council will still consider the views and opinions of those likely to be affected. This consideration can be achieved without using formal engagement processes.

The detail: how and when

Council has a multi-platform approach to engagement, including (but not limited to):

- Direct in-person engagement with individuals and groups from the community, and other project stakeholders
- Written engagement, including letters and emails
- Traditional media, including media releases, advertising space in radio or newspapers
- Council’s online engagement platform ‘Let’s Talk *Kōrero māi*’
- Council’s social media platforms

How engagement is delivered will vary depending on the needs and opportunities for each project.

Council’s approach to consultation and engagement utilises the International Association of Public Participation’s engagement spectrum, which is attached as Appendix A.

Project owners and lead officers are encouraged to consider at the outset what the proposed engagement outcomes are and how best to work across Council’s engagement platforms to maximise reach, and to ensure as much of the relevant community as possible are informed and engaged.

Reporting outcomes

Council provides engagement analysis and reporting to elected members, that are publicly accessible through our website, reflecting the results of all consultation.

Council utilises various channels to update respondents as to the outcomes of engagement, including:

- Publishing summary reports on Council's website
- Communicating outcomes through media and engagement outlets, in accordance with Council's Media Policy
- Providing direct responses, where resources allow.

Council seeks feedback on our engagement and consultative processes and channels to continuously enhance and improve these.

Relevant legislation:

- Local Government Act 2002

Related documents:

- Community Development Strategy
- Māori Participation Framework (*in development*)
- Media Policy

Appendix 1: Council’s engagement spectrum



	Inform	Consult	Involve	Partner	Empower
Goal	To provide balanced and objective information in a timely manner.	To obtain feedback on analysis, issues, alternatives, and decisions.	To work with the public to make sure that concerns and aspirations are considered and understood.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision making.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Objective	“We will keep you informed.”	“We will listen to and account for your concerns.”	“We will work with you to ensure your concepts and aspirations are directly reflected in the decisions made.”	“We will look to you for advice and innovation and incorporate this in decisions as much as possible.”	“We will implement what you decide.”
Examples	Council’s website, media releases, public notices.	Submissions and hearings.	Spatial planning (seeks community input on the design process and incorporates these where possible).	Omakau community hub (A council-owned asset, but building design and activation is developed in partnership with the community).	Community plans (Council facilitates their development but the content and actions reflect and are owned by the community).