



Significance and Engagement Policy

20 September 2017

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PURPOSE

The purpose of the Significance and Engagement Policy is to ensure that the Masterton community has an opportunity for meaningful and genuine involvement in Masterton District Council's (MDC) decision-making. Specifically, the policy:

- enables MDC and its communities to identify the degree of significance attached to particular decisions;
- provides clarity about how and when communities can expect to be engaged in decisions about different issues, assets, or other matters;
- ensures MDC is informed from the beginning of a decision-making process about the extent and type of any public engagement that is expected before a particular decision is made; and
- ensures MDC meets its obligations under the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA).

SCOPE

This policy applies to all MDC decisions.

Where another legislative Act specifies particular consultation requirements, the other Act will take precedence over the requirements of this policy. This includes, but is not limited to, the Resource Management Act 1991, Land Transport Act 1998 and Biosecurity Act 1993.

DETERMINING SIGNIFICANCE

For every matter requiring a decision, MDC will determine the degree of significance, taking into consideration how a matter may affect the people, services, facilities and infrastructure in the district.

Significance Criteria

When determining if a matter is significant, MDC will consider the following criteria:

- Does the decision relate to a strategic asset (refer Appendix 1 for a list of strategic assets)?
- Is there, or is there likely to be, a substantial change in the level of service provided by MDC?
- Has there been, or is there likely to be:
 - a high level of community interest in the decision;
 - any controversy around the impact or consequence of the decision
 - a specific area affected (e.g. geographically, or area of a community by interest, age or activity); or
 - an impact or consequence relating to the duration of the effect arising from the decision?
- Will the decision substantially affect MDC's debt, rates on residents or the financial figures in any one year or more of the current Long-Term Plan?
- Does the decision involve entry into any partnership with the private sector to carry out a significant activity or any new proposal to contract out the delivery of any MDC group of activities?
- Does the decision involve MDC exiting an existing activity or adding a new group of activities?
- Is the decision difficult to reverse?

Generally, if the answer is yes to one or more of the criteria above, the matter will be considered significant.

Level of Significance

Once a decision has been identified as significant, the degree of significance will be determined. Significance is considered on a continuum, ranging from day to day matters with low impact on the community to more significant matters that will have a greater impact.

Refer to Appendix 2: Determining the Level of Significance.

REPORTING TO COUNCIL

All decisions that are assessed as significant, irrespective of the level of significance, will be reported to Council. The report will include:

- a statement that the matter has been considered in regard to this policy;
- the level of significance determined and the reasoning for that conclusion;
- a recommended approach to community engagement (see below); and
- statements addressing the observance of Sections 77-82 of the LGA.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Enabling effective participation of individuals and communities in MDC's decision-making is the primary purpose of community engagement. This allows elected members to make better-informed decisions on behalf of those they represent.

The exact form and extent of engagement will be determined on a case by case basis depending on the significance of the matter and any legislative requirements. Refer to Appendix 3: Methods of Engagement.

Principles for Engaging and Consulting with Communities

When engaging and consulting with communities, MDC will:

- **provide reasonable access to relevant information** in a timely manner and in a format that is appropriate to people's needs.
- provide **sufficient time** for considered responses from interested and affected parties.
- work in **partnership** with appropriate representative and special interest groups.
- be **transparent** and provide information about the purpose of engagement and the scope of the decisions.
- **encourage** all interested and affected parties to present their views in any way that is appropriate to their needs e.g. written submission, oral submissions.
- receive all views with an **open mind** and give those views due consideration when making a decision.
- engage with **Iwi/Māori**.
- respond to diversity and seek views from a wide cross-section of the community.
- encourage **planning, coordination and collaboration** amongst MDC teams and entities for engagement activities.
- provide **feedback** regarding the outcome of decision-making process and the reasons for those decisions.

Engagement with Iwi/Māori

MDC is committed to developing and maintaining positive working relationships with mana whenua, taura here and Māori communities in the Masterton district. In accordance with the LGA (s.81), MDC will:

- establish and maintain processes to provide opportunities for Māori to contribute to MDC's decision-making processes;
- foster the development of Iwi/Māori capacity to contribute to MDC's decision-making processes; and
- provide relevant information to Iwi/Māori for the above purposes.

MDC has memorandums of partnership with Rangitāne o Wairarapa and Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa. Each Iwi is represented at Council meetings and participate in the Iwi Governance Forum.

Engagement Processes

Except where legislation requires a specific engagement process to be followed (see below), MDC will determine the most appropriate approach on a case by case basis. The approach will be in proportion to significance of the decision.

An Engagement Plan will be developed for all major decisions. The plan will:

- state the appropriate form and extent of engagement;
- factor in the unique needs of each affected community;
- consider the extent that MDC is already aware of the views of potentially interested and affected people; and
- involve elected members throughout the engagement process.

Where a decision has district-wide implications, MDC will endeavour to ensure that the locations selected for direct engagement with communities are spread across the district and are readily accessible to local residents and ratepayers.

Special Consultative Procedure

The Special Consultative Procedure (SCP) is a prescribed process for consultation in the LGA (s.83). Where the LGA or any other Act requires a SCP to be followed, MDC will adhere to this process.

MDC may also choose to use a SCP for any other decision it wishes to consult on. This will generally occur when the decision is determined to be of a high level of significance.

Consultation under Other Acts

Under the LGA (s.82(5)) if specific consultation is required under the LGA or any other Act, and if any part of that requirement is inconsistent with any Section 82 principle of consultation, the provision of the other Act or Part will prevail (to the extent of the inconsistency).

Information Requirements

When undertaking any engagement process relating to a significant decision, MDC will provide the community with sufficient information on which to provide meaningful feedback, in accordance with all relevant legislation including the LGA (s.82A).

Length of Engagement

The length of engagement will differ, depending on the:

- level of significance;
- timeframes required under legislation;
- decision-making requirements and the possible effects of the decision that have not been deemed highly significant;
- extent to which the Council is already aware of the issue or views of the community;
- level of community interest in proposed council decisions; and
- structure and demands of the decision-making process.

Providing Feedback to the Community

MDC will make available to the community clear records, or descriptions of relevant decisions, made on a matter. Explanatory material relating to the decision will be included e.g. references to reports used to reach a decision.

Submitters on a matter will be notified of decisions by letter, email, MDC newsletter, media statement or public notice.

Decisions and reports will be made available on the Council website, or hard copies supplied upon request, unless they contain confidential matters that are not able to be made available to the public.

Reasons Engagement may not be Necessary

There may be times when MDC will determine it is not necessary, appropriate or possible to engage the community on a decision, if one or more of the criteria below apply:

- the decision is not of a nature or significance that requires engagement;
- MDC already has a sound understanding of the views and preferences of the interested or affected parties;
- there is a need for confidentiality or commercial sensitivity;
- the costs of engagement outweigh the benefits for it;
- the decision has already been addressed and consulted on through MDC's strategies, policies or plans;
- an immediate or quick response is required and it is not reasonably practicable to engage, including if a delay in decision-making could result in:
 - unreasonable or significant damage to property;
 - risk to people's health and safety; or
 - the loss of a substantial opportunity to achieve the council's strategic objectives.

If MDC does not engage, community views will still be considered before a decision is made and the community will be informed about the decision as much as possible.

DEFINITIONS

Community: A group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common.

Engagement: The process of seeking information from the community to inform and assist decision-making.

Significance: The LGA (s.5) defines significance as:

“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”.

Strategic Asset: The LGA (s.5) defines strategic asset as:

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; and includes:

- a) any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA 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.

REVIEW OF POLICY

The policy will be reviewed every three years as part of the Long-Term Plan process.

REFERENCES

Local Government Act 2002

VERSION CONTROL

Date	Summary of Amendments	Approved By
29/10/2014	New policy	Council
20/09/2017	Revised policy to improve readability	Council

Appendix 1: Strategic Assets

Assets and groups of assets that the Masterton District Council holds and considers to be strategic are:

- Utility Networks (as a whole)
- Urban Water Supply
- Wastewater Treatment and Reticulation
- Transfer Station
- Roading Network (including streetlights, footpaths, paving and street furniture)
- Stormwater Network
- Library and Archives
- Hood Aerodrome
- Senior Housing
- Council Parks, Sports fields & Cemeteries
- Mawley Park
- Trust House Recreation Centre (including the War Memorial Stadium)
- District Building and Town Hall

Appendix 2: Determining the Level of Significance

Assess the level of impact of the proposal, policy or other matter against each of the criteria listed in the table below. The table provides examples of impacts that fall under each level of significance.

Criteria	Significance		
	Low	Moderate	High
Strategic assets	No substantive effect on strategic assets	Sale or substantial impact on part of a strategic asset	Sale of a strategic asset or activities that affect the whole asset
Levels of service	Minor loss or change to levels of service provided MDC	Moderate change to levels of service provided by MDC	Substantial change to levels of service provided by MDC
Community interest, controversy, affected areas and timing of effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor community impact Easily reversible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor to moderate community interest Moderate community impact One or more settlements or wards of the district are disproportionately affected Duration of effect may have a detrimental impact on people or community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High community interest Impact is (or is likely to be) controversial Specific area is affected (geographical or area of the community by interest, age or activity) Substantial impacts arising from the duration of an effect
Financial impact	No material effect on resident rates, MDC debt or projected budget	Minor effect on resident rates, MDC debt or projected budget	Substantial effect on resident rates, MDC debt or projected budget
Council activities	Minor change to how MDC manages groups of activities	Partial exit from a group of activities	Full exit from an existing activity or adding a new group of activities
Partnership arrangements	No substantive change to partnership agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entering a partnership with the private sector to carry out minor activities on behalf of MDC (excluding consultant services) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entering a partnership with the private sector to carry out a significant activity on behalf of MDC Contracting out the delivery of any MDC group of activities
Reversibility of decision or proposal	Easily reversible with no adverse impact	Can be reversed with only minor adverse impact	Reversal of decision would have a significant impact on the MDC and/or community

Appendix 3: Methods of Engagement

	Low Significance	Medium to High Significance (one or more approach may be used)			
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Consultation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Examples of matters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Report Infrastructure upgrades Results of hearings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rates reviews Bylaw reviews Psychoactive Substances Policy review Local Alcohol Policy review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long-Term Plan development Infrastructure projects that impact on people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resource consents Shared services issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual SmartWater campaign Locally based policies, bylaws and initiatives EnviroSchools programme Local body elections
Examples of Engagement Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council reports Website update Media release Public notice Newsletter Letter Social media Customer services staff information training Staff email networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public meeting Open days Iwi liaison Surveys or focus groups Online consultation Public hearings Identified staff as points of contact Print and radio advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion groups and workshops Roadshows Residents survey Community-led development Pre-engagement strategy to heighten awareness and create interest and/or participation Expert opinion on outcomes sought by initiative/activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working groups Advisory board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advertising campaigns Local body elections process Community planning News media Social media Conversation cafes Hotline Providing the community tools they need to own the activity
Timing of Community Involvement	Council would generally advise the community once a decision is made	Council would advise the community once a draft decision is made. The community will generally be provided with up to 4 weeks to participate and respond	Council would generally provide the community with a greater lead in to allow time to be involved in the process	Council would generally involve the community at the start to scope the issue, again after the information has been collected and again when options are being considered	Council would generally provide the community with a greater lead in to allow time to be involved in the process e.g. typically a month or more or potentially an ongoing relationship that is activated at certain points

Appendix 4: Information Requirements

When consulting with the community, the following information should be provided:

- clear information on what is being proposed and why it is being proposed;
- the advantages and disadvantages of each option being considered;
- what impacts (if any) may occur if the proposal goes ahead;
- if a plan or policy is proposed for adoption, a copy of the draft or details of the amendments;
- how the community can provide their views;
- the timeframe; and,
- how the community will be informed about the outcome.