

Significance and Engagement Policy

Kaupapahere mō te Whai
Hiranga me te Toro Iwi

1. Introduction

The purpose of local government includes enabling democratic decision-making and action by, and on behalf of, communities.

The purpose of this policy is to make sure Council takes a consistent and transparent approach in determining the significance (importance) of a decision and the appropriate level of engagement for that decision. The policy also helps the community anticipate and understand the approach the Council to decision making.

This policy outlines how Horowhenua District Council will involve the Horowhenua community in its decision-making. There are two parts. First, it sets out Council's general approach to determining the significance of proposals and decisions about issues, assets and other matters. Then it sets out how Council will engage with the community relative to the significance of the decision.

Decision makers

Horowhenua District Council (Council) is the governing body that makes district wide decisions, while the Te Awahou Foxton Community Board makes local decisions within its remit.

Elected members and members of the following bodies, have a key role in identifying and communicating the views of local communities on district wide strategies, policies, plans and bylaws to the governing body:

- Te Awahou Foxton Community Board
- The Community Wellbeing Committee (a standing committee of Council) that facilitates and receives reports from various forums including Youth Voice, Access and Inclusion Forum, Older Persons Network, Education Horowhenua, and Youth Services Network
- Risk and Assurance Committee, Community Funding and Recognition Committee, District Plan Steering Group, Capital Projects Delivery Steering Group, (standing committees or groups of Council)

2. Objectives

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) requires all councils to have a Significance and Engagement Policy. The objectives of this policy are:

- To establish a process for determining the significance of a decision
- To support public involvement in significant decision-making
- To ensure that Council meets all legislative requirements regarding consultation and community engagement.

Engagement gives Council an opportunity to strengthen relationships with our communities. It brings the “power of the people” into decision-making by enabling communities to have their views heard and considered. It enables Council and the community to work together on issues that matter to our district.

3. Making it work in practice

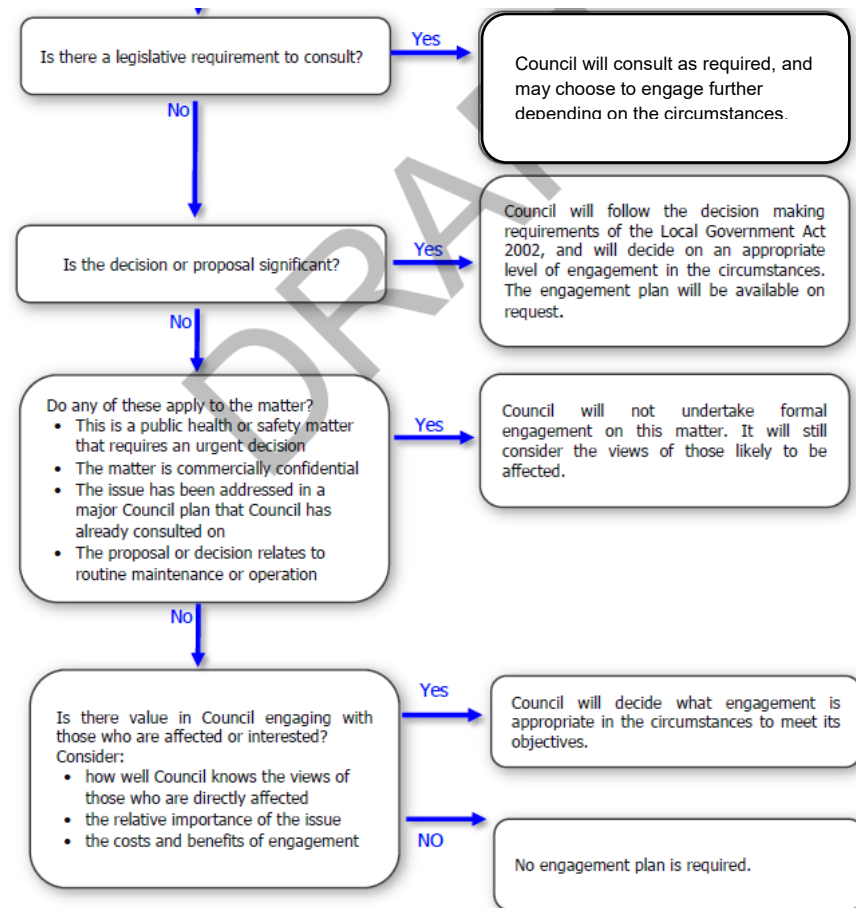
There are some key questions for Council officers to answer in making the policy work in practice. Some decisions require the use of the Special Consultative Procedure under the LGA. See Part 4.2 of this policy about the requirements for these decisions.

For all other decisions, Council will:

- Identify the **objective** – what is being sought to be achieved and why?
- Identify all reasonably practicable **options** for achieving the objective
- **Assess** their advantages and disadvantages.

Next, **design** the decision-making and engagement process taking into account:

- Existing knowledge of community views on the matter? If not, further engagement/consultation is appropriate.
- Significance (see Part 4.2) If Council has decided to consult, or is otherwise legally required to, ensure that consultation complies with consultation principles (see Part 5). This can be illustrated in the following flowchart.



What's the difference between engagement and consultation?

Consultation is one form of engagement – like a sub-set. This is often a formal process seeking community feedback on proposals and the need to *consult* is stated in legislation. It is used for processes such as the Long Term Plan which agrees Council's strategic direction and how budgets are set and projects are prioritised. Council will *consult* the community on *significant* decisions.

Engagement is broader. It is an on-going process of sharing information with the community and seeking feedback, with the purpose of involving the community in the decision-making process. Engagement can range from informing, consulting, involving, collaborating to empowering the community.

There are many tools for engaging and includes surveys, formal consultation, social media, radio ads, websites, publications and more (see Part XX). For most Council decisions, there is no specific requirement to consult the community, but this Policy will explain the different ways Council seeks and considers community views and preferences.

Maori involvement in decision making

Council is dedicated to fostering the development of Māori capacity to contribute to the decision-making processes of the Council over the next 20 years. While it is a requirement in Schedule 10 of the Local Government Act (LGA) 2002, Council aims to extend beyond the adopted legislative framework, to build and maintain strong and meaningful relationships with the Māori community. Partnership with tangata whenua is one of Council's five community outcomes.

Council's goal for engagement with Māori is for strengthened and ongoing partnerships. This aims to ensure Council receives appropriate information, advice and understanding about the potential implications and/or effects of proposals on the cultural values of local iwi and hapū.

Council is committed to providing relevant information to inform Māori contribution and improve Māori access to the Council's engagement and decision-making processes, as set out in section 81 of the LGA.

Council will work with iwi and hapū to ensure their contributions are represented and their status is publicly recognised. Council recognises that early engagement with iwi and hapū is often the most effective – in particular for those decisions that have greater significance.

Council affirms its obligations to involving Māori in decision-making processes as set down in the LGA, which includes recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi. On occasions, due to the relationship Council has with iwi and hapū will mean that the approach Council takes to engaging with iwi and hapū will differ to the approach Council takes to engaging with the community.

Factors that guide Council's decision making

Decisions of high significance in the Long Term Plan

Decisions assessed to be of high significance to the Council and the community should normally be included in the LTP process. This will ensure that they are linked to community outcomes proposed in the context with other major decisions, and put before the community within this planning and consultation process and timing.

Making decisions of high significance outside the Long Term Plan

There will be decision of high significance that must be made outside of the LTP process. The Council will ensure an appropriate engagement and decision-making process is followed and that this is addressed in a report to the Council. The Council will use the special consultative procedure when it is legally required to.

Reporting of decisions

All reports by officers to Council or a Council Committee which are seeking a decision will include a statement addressing the issue of significance. If the proposal is considered to be of high significance the report will describe how relevant sections of the Act and this policy have been addressed.

Other Council decisions and levels of reporting

For decisions of low or medium significance the Council will comply with the sections 76 to 82 of the LGA. For decisions made under delegated authority and for which there is no Council or committee report, the Council will not necessarily formally document the assessment of significance or the Council's compliance with sections 76 to 82.

The Council will ensure that, in fulfilling the above requirements, the level of attention, consideration disclosure, and engagement taken is in proportion to the significance of the decision.

Council may reassess the significance of a matter at any point during a decision-making process.

When this Policy does not apply

Many decisions made by Council will be made under legislation outside the LGA. These Acts set out the decision-making and consultation procedure required to be followed. As a result, there are some decision-making processes that are not within the scope of this Significance and Engagement Policy:

- Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA),
- Biosecurity Act 1993,
- Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002
- Land Transport Act 1998
- Local Electoral Act 2001.

It also includes decisions about enforcement under various legislation including bylaws unless these are specifically included in this policy.

4. Significance

Significance is the degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by Council, in terms of its likely impact on and likely consequences for the district; any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in the matter; the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so (as described by the LGA).

4.1 Approach to determining Significance

Council's general approach to determining the significance of proposals and decisions about issues, assets, and other matters is to consider the following:

- (a) The consequences for the strategic asset
- (b) The financial impact on Council, including the impact on debt
- (c) The impact on rates
- (d) The impact on levels of service specified in the Long Term Plan
- (e) The level of community interest.

- (f) The level of cultural interest
- (g) The level of environmental impact.

4.2 Criteria for determining significance

The range of issues requiring decisions by Council is wide, and it is impossible to foresee every possibility. The following criteria (refer to table below) will be used to guide the decision on determining significance.

It is noted that matters which do not satisfy these criteria may still be determined to have a high degree of significance where it is known that the decision will nevertheless generate a high degree of controversy.

The type and nature of the decision will influence how Council will go about communicating and engaging with its communities. Council will consider the extent to which community views and preferences are already known in designing the engagement process.

The Council will also take into account views already expressed in the community, where there has been no material change to the issue since previous engagement. Council will make judgements on the level of support for those views when determining the significance of a decision.

The following table provides the criteria for determining significance and an indicative guide to the type of engagement that could be expected at the related level of significance.

Rating	Criteria	Key Factors to be Considered	Level of Engagement
When a decision is indicated as high on two or more criteria it is likely to be highly significant and therefore be determined to be Significant.			
<p>High</p> <p>E.g. the Long Term Plan, a decision to transfer strategic assets to or from Council; or</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to significantly alter the level of service provided by the Council of a significant activity (including to stop or start a new group of activity); - new major infrastructure - Local Alcohol Policy 	Importance to Horowhenua	Any decision that would significantly alter the level of service provided by the Council of a significant activity (including a decision to commence or cease such an activity)	<p>Large-scale publicity and promotion.</p> <p>This may include an informal phase followed by more formal forms of engagement.</p> <p>Promotion through a range of channels and events, potentially including hui, a focus on online activities, newsletters and publications with a wide reach.</p>
		Extent of costs, opportunity costs, externalities and subsidies	
		Uncertainty, irreversibility, and the impact of the decision in terms of the community's sustainability and resilience.	
	Community Interest	High levels of public interest or the potential to generate controversy or high public interest.	
		Large divisions in community views on the decision	
		A moderate impact on a large proportion of the community or a high impact on a moderate number of persons	
	Consistency with existing policy	Decisions that are substantially inconsistent with current policies and strategies	
The impact on Council's capacity and capability	High capital or operation expenditure		
	A financial transaction with a value of, or greater than 5%-10% of rates revenue in the year of the decision.		
<p>Medium</p> <p>E.g. Works on main roads, delivering on implementation and action plans</p>		Relationship to factors under high and low significance criteria	If the Council chooses to conduct engagement, targeted engagement with the affected audience, online engagement with surveys or social media, information through libraries, or promotion through local media.
<p>Low</p> <p>E.g. Redevelopment of community halls, park improvements, footpath and road works</p>		Affects a limited number of individuals, to a low degree	<p>If the Council chooses to conduct engagement it might include localised promotions (e.g. display boards and local media) briefings, the website or social media. Targeted engagement, for example through service users where appropriate. Information online and in local libraries, surveys and open days may be appropriate.</p>
	Has very limited public interest		
	Low consequence for Horowhenua		
	Low impact on the Council being able to perform its role		
	Able to be reversed		
Is a strong logical step from a prior decision			

4.3 Strategic assets

The LGA requires that any decision that significantly alters the level of service provided by Council of a significant activity (including a decision to commence or cease such an activity) or transfers ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the Council must be explicitly provided for in the LTP and can only be consulted on in the LTP.

Council must list the assets considered to be strategic assets within its Significance and Engagement Policy. Council's *strategic assets* are the assets Council owns that are vital for delivering services to the Horowhenua community. These are assets or a group of assets that Council needs to retain if it is to maintain Council's capacity to achieve or promote any outcome Council has determined to be important to the current or future well-being of the community (as described by the LGA).

The assets and groups of assets Council deem to be strategic assets and therefore significant in terms of this Policy include:

	Activity / Group of Activities Asset
<i>Reserves</i>	Public cemeteries, parks, reserves and sportsgrounds
<i>Land Transport</i>	Roading and pedestrian network as a whole*
<i>Water Supply</i>	Each water supply system as a whole* (excluding water races)
<i>Wastewater Disposal</i>	Each Wastewater drainage system as a whole*
<i>Solid Waste Disposal</i>	Hokio Landfill
<i>Libraries and Community Centres</i>	Te Takeretanga o Kura-hau-pō, Te Awahou Nieuwe Stroom, Shannon Library
<i>Stormwater</i>	Each Stormwater drainage system as a whole*
<i>Aquatic Centres</i>	Levin Aquatic Centre, Foxton Aquatic Centre

* Council takes a group or whole-of-asset approach, which means the group of assets as a whole and not each individual asset within the group.

Not limiting the application of this provision to other assets, the following examples show the application of this policy to these group assets:

“Water supply network assets” means those group assets as a whole and not each individual pipeline, reservoir, and pump station. The Council does not consider that the addition or deletion of parts of that group asset (being a part of the group asset as a whole) will affect the overall group asset's strategic nature.

- “Roading assets” and “reserve assets” mean those group assets as a whole. Therefore, if the Council acquires land for a new road (or the formed road itself) or new reserve lands as a result of subdivision, those additions are part of the day-to-day business of managing the roading and reserves assets.
- Decisions that involve the transfer of ownership or control of an element of an activity / group strategic asset where the remaining assets of the group still enable the Council to meet its strategic outcome will not on their own be regarded as a strategic asset.

Examples include:

- o disposal of former roads, provided that the Council has followed the road stopping processes under the Public Works Act 1981.
- o decisions to facilitate the development of the Levin Town Centre in accordance with the Levin Town Centre Implementation Plan (December 2023) and actions in accordance with the Horowhenua 2040 Blueprint Implementation Plan (December 2023).
- o disposal of individual properties, parks or reserves, including decisions to give effect to the Property Disposal Strategy provided that the Council has followed any relevant procedures in the Reserves Act 1977 or the Local Government Act 2002 for areas managed as reserve but not covered by the Reserves Act.

5. Our approach to Engagement

Council is committed to improving engagement and ensuring that final decisions are guided by the views of the community and those affected by the decision.

Community is at the heart of what we do, so it is important we work alongside the community to achieve the best outcomes, they are our customers, stakeholders, residents, ratepayers, subject matter experts and partners. We aim to communicate effectively, with relevant messaging, in the relevant communications channel, at the right time to encourage participation with Council processes. We may do this in a variety of ways such as having a presence in public spaces, through our digital channels, front line staff, print media, radio, workshops, community forums and community events.

5.1 Community preferences for engagement

To identify community preferences for engagement, Council analyses engagement data to gain actionable insights, draws on feedback and advice from elected members, district stakeholder groups, the district's communities and leverages the professional expertise of Council's officers.

5.2 Council commits to a principle-based approach to community engagement, we aim to be:

- Authentic
- Transparent
- Responsive
- Consistent
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Respect the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi

5.3 Framework for engagement

Council will use the following framework for engagement, and take into account:

- The significance of the matter
- The urgency and timing required for a decision
- Council's familiarity with the views and preferences of people who would be affected by a proposal
- Relevant messaging, communications channels and timings for engagement
- The costs and benefits of any consultation process or procedure
- Any legislative requirements for particular forms of consultation.

5.4 Legislative considerations

There are a number of decisions that can only be made if they are explicitly provided for in Council's LTP as set out in the Local Government Act 2002 Amendment Act 2014. These are:

- To alter significantly the intended level of service provision for any significant activity undertaken by or on behalf of Council, including a decision to commence or cease any such activity
- To transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from Council

In addition, Council is required to use the Special Consultative Procedure (SCP) set out in Section 83 of the LGA for some plans and processes including:

- Adopting or amending a Long Term Plan
- Adopting, amending or revoking bylaws of significant interest to or impact on the public (for all other bylaw matters Council will consult following the principles in section 82 of LGA)
- Adopting, amending or revoking a Local Alcohol Policy; and
- Setting rates.

There may be other areas where Council deems it appropriate to use a SCP.

The SCP process requires Council to:

- Prepare and adopt a statement of proposal and in some cases a summary of the statement of proposal which must:
 - Be a fair representation of the statement of proposal
 - Be in a form determined by Council
 - Indicate where it is available
 - State the period it is open for public submission, which must be for not less than one month
- Make publicly available:
 - The statement of proposal
 - A description of how people will be able to present their views
 - A statement of the period the proposal is open for comment/submission
- Make the summary of proposal widely available
- Allow people to present their views to Council ensuring that they have a reasonable opportunity to do so and know how and when this opportunity will be available to them
- Allow people to present their views by audio link or audio-visual link

Note: Feedback via social media: 'Submissions' as referred to in the LGA are formal and include private details of the person(s) or group making the submission. While this remains Council's preferred method of making a submission, Council is committed to including posts and comments on social media platforms relating to the engagement as feedback when reporting back to Council.

Where none of section 86 to 93a of the LGA apply but Council is required, or chooses to use the SCP, the statement of proposal is a draft of any plan, policy or similar document, or in any other case a detailed statement of the proposal which must include:

- The reasons for the proposal
- An analysis of options
- Any other relevant information.

5.5 When Council might not engage

Sometimes the nature and circumstances of a decision to be made may not allow Council the opportunity to engage or consult with the community. These circumstances could include:

- Emergency management activities during a state of emergency
- Decisions to act where it is necessary to:
 - Comply with the law
 - Save or protect life, or manage the risk to people's health and safety
 - Prevent serious or immediate damage to property
 - Avoid, remedy or mitigate an adverse effect on the environment
 - Protect the integrity of existing or future infrastructure
- The matter is commercially sensitive
- The matter could result in the loss of a substantial opportunity to achieve the Council's strategic objectives
- When urgency is required.

Council may choose to limit its engagement when

- we already have a good understanding of the views and preferences of those affected
- the matter has already been addressed in a Council policy or plan where costs are expected to outweigh the benefits.
For example, if the cost of engagement is likely to considerably increase the cost of a commercial transaction to Council. In these situations, Council will either not engage at all, or tailor its engagement to suit circumstances in which the decision is to be made.

The LGA sets out a process for the Council to follow if the Council has a good reason to make a decision outside of this policy.

5.6 What Council will undertake for significant proposals and decisions

When Council makes decisions about issues/plans/policies identified as significant then it will:

- Identify and assess as many options as are reasonably practicable
- Quantify the costs and benefits resulting from the decision to be made
- Provide detailed information accessible to the public
- Maintain clear and complete records showing how compliance with the Significance and Engagement Policy was achieved
- Take into account views already expressed in the community, where there has been no material change to the issue since previous engagement
- Provide processes for engaging with Māori.

5.7 Linking level of engagement with level of significance

The significance of a matter:

- Should guide Council's decisions concerning the extent and nature of the engagement to be undertaken with the persons likely to be affected or interested in the decision or matter.
- Will influence the amount of time, money and effort Council invests in exploring, evaluating and carrying out engagement activities. It is important that the right balance between the costs of engagement and the value it can add to decision-making.

Council must comply with the principles of consultation set out in Section 82 of the LGA in such a manner that Council considers, at its discretion, to be appropriate. In determining what is appropriate, Council must have regard to various matters including the nature and significance of the decision or matter (including its likely impact from the perspective of the persons who will or may be affected by the decision). The more significant a matter from the perspective of the persons who may be affected by the decision, the more likely Council will need to consult with them on their views.

Using the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) engagement spectrum (5.6) as a basis, the method(s) of engagement adopted by Council before it makes a decision may depend on whether or not:

- The matter is of low or no significance (e.g. technical and/or minor amendments to a bylaw or Council policy), and there may be a very small group of people affected by or with an interest in the decision.
- The matter is significant only to a relatively small group of people or is of low impact to many. They should be informed about the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions and/or consulted so that any concerns, alternatives and aspirations they have are understood and considered.
- The matter is significant not only to a small group of people particularly affected but also to a wider community that may have an interest in the decision to be made. They may be informed, consulted and/or involved to seek public input and feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.
- For more significant matters Council may elect to collaborate, or partner, with a community in any aspect of a decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of preferred solutions. This is more likely to occur where there is a distinct group of affected or particularly interested people.

Depending on the level of significance and the nature of the issue, proposal or decision being made, and by using a range of engagement methods communities may be empowered to participate in the decision-making process.

The actual location on the engagement spectrum will be made on a case by case basis, however, as a minimum, they all must be informed. This decision will guide the selection of appropriate engagement tools and techniques to be used. High significance decisions must include the use of engagement tools and techniques beyond inform. A change in engagement level during an engagement process can occur if it is deemed appropriate at that time.

5.6 Engagement activities – adapted from the IAP2 Engagement Spectrum

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
<i>Public Participation Goal</i>	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are constantly understood and considered.	To partner with the community and stakeholders 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.
<i>Examples</i>	Annual Report, Annual Plan (no issues of significance), infrastructure upgrades, water restrictions, civil defence, rural fire, road closure, Council reports.	Rates review, bylaw reviews, Local Alcohol Policy.	LTP, Annual Plan (with issues of significance) infrastructure projects, policy development.	Representation review, development of a strategy, upgrade of or development of a new community facility.	Local body elections, binding referendum.

5.7 Engagement Outcomes

Following each engagement process, the results/views will be presented to Council for consideration as part of the decision-making process.

Alongside this, the Council officers managing the engagement process will apply a continuous improvement approach and ensure that any lessons learnt and key findings from the engagement process are captured to help inform future engagements.

5.8 Policy Review

Council will review the Significance and Engagement Policy every three (3) years or as required.

It will be amended and agreed through public consultation if necessary, separately or as part of the Long Term Plan.

As part of the review process for this Policy, Council will engage with the community to gain an understanding of their engagement preferences.

1. Appendices

Appendix One: Definitions

'As a whole': Permits (even though not explicitly provided for in the LTP) the opportune purchase, replacement, sale or other dealings with components of the system without affecting the provision of the service.

Community: A community, for the purposes of this policy, is a group of people with shared or common interest, identity, experience or values. For example, cultural, social, environmental, business, financial, neighbourhood, political or spatial groups.

The community refers to the people that make up the diverse communities that live in Horowhenua.

Consultation: A subset of engagement; a formal process where people can present their views to Council on a specific decision or matter that is proposed and made public.
(Council must consult in ways that meet the consultation principles in the Local Government Act 2002 LGA, section 82 (1) and any other legislation relevant to the decision or matter proposed.)

Decisions: Refers to all the decisions made by or on behalf of Council including those made by officers under delegation.

Engagement: Is a term used to describe the process of establishing relationships, and seeking information from the community to inform and assist decision making.

Engagement is an important part of participatory democracy within which there is a continuum of community involvement.

Minimal: Is a term used by Council to measure significance, it is an adjective to describe something that is of least quantity or amount possible, assignable, allowable or the like.

Significance: The degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by Council, in terms of its likely impact on, and likely consequences for; the district or region; any persons who are likely to be particularly affected by, or interested in the matter; the capacity of the local authority to perform its role, and the financial and other costs of doing so (as described by the LGA).

Special Consultative Procedure (SCP): A formal consultation process prescribed in section 83 of the LGA that must be used to consult on certain matters and can be chosen by Council to consult on other matters as considered appropriate.

Strategic Asset: 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 (as described by the LGA).

Substantial: Is a term used by Council to measure significance, it is an adjective to describe something that is large in size, value or importance.

Appendix Two: LGA engagement principles

Section 14 of the LGA sets out engagement principles relating to local authorities, including:

- Conducting its business in an open, transparent and democratically accountable manner
- Making itself self-aware of, and having regard to, the views of all its communities
- When making a decision, taking account of:
 - the diversity of the community and the community's interests within its district or region; the interests of future as well as current communities; and the likely impact of any decisions on the interests

Providing opportunities for Māori to contribute to its decision-making processes.

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