

Significance and engagement policy

Council makes decisions every day, ranging from day-to-day matters to those with a very high level of importance, impact, or public interest. This policy sets out when and how our communities can expect to be engaged in our decision-making processes¹

The policy:

- » tells our community **when and how we will engage** with them on a matter or proposal; and
- » provides us with a tool for defining **what is significant²** helping to determine where a greater level of community engagement will result in better decision making.

In this policy we use the following Māori terms:

Kaitiaki	Tāngata whenua who carry out kaitiakitanga
Kaitiakitanga	The implementation by tāngata whenua of the responsibilities and kaupapa passed down from their ancestors to take care of the places, natural resources and other taonga (valued material and non-material assets) in their rohe, and the mauri (essential life force) which exists within them
Kaupapa	Plan, purpose, strategy, method or fundamental principle
Mana whenua	Territorial rights, authority or jurisdiction over land or territory; power associated with possession and occupation of tribal land
Rohe	Region, area or territory; also the geographical territory of an iwi or hapū
Takiwā	District or area; place or territory used by or associated with an iwi, hapū or whānau
Wāhi tapu	Special or sacred place or site

Our approach to community engagement

Community engagement means connecting with other people in a decision-making process, to share ideas and build understanding. It involves a range of different approaches.

We are elected to make decisions on your behalf, however, when we're engaging communities, or deciding the extent of engagement, we will be guided by the following principles:

- » seek community views on significant matters, to ensure we have enough information to make our decisions;
- » give you the information you need to be involved;
- » listen to your views and consider them with an open mind;
- » continue to improve how we engage with Māori and enable input into our decisions;
- » target our engagement to those directly affected or interested in the decision;
- » do our best to provide opportunities for you to present your views in a way that suits you;

1 This policy is intended to meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 2002 (Section 76AA) for a Significance and Engagement Policy

2 Significance (as defined by the Local Government Act 2002) means 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

- » let you know what decisions we make and why;
- » continue to improve how we engage with you.

When and how we will engage

Different levels of community engagement will be used in different situations. Sometimes we already have a good understanding of community views and preferences, but at other times we may need more information. Wherever possible, we will endeavour to engage with communities on their turf, and at a time that best meets their needs, to make it as simple as we can for them to have their say.

Consulting

We will **consult** when we are required to by law, when a proposal is considered significant (as defined later in this policy) and when we need more information on options for responding to an issue.

When we **consult**, we will make information about the issue or proposal available to the relevant communities, present options where relevant, tell them how our process works, and how they can provide feedback. We will offer an opportunity to talk to councillors, or independent commissioners, face-to-face. We will collect information and feedback on the proposal or issue from our communities and use this to guide decision-making. This will often follow a formal process set out in legislation.

Involving and collaborating

We will **involve or collaborate** with our communities in decision-making when we need more information on community views to fully understand an issue and develop a proposal for dealing with that issue, or where we can be more effective and efficient in achieving our priorities through working with others.

When we **involve or collaborate**, we will invite our communities to share their thoughts, ideas and aspirations. This will guide our decision-making, and in some cases help us to decide if we need to consult. We'll also work with already-established groups to achieve shared goals.

Informing

We will **inform** our communities about decisions made when we believe that there is some interest in the decision and/or people may be affected by the decision, but that further engagement is not warranted.

When we **inform**, we will let you know what we have decided to do, from where you can find out more information, and who to talk to if you have questions; and we will advise you of any timeframes that might be relevant.

No engagement

When there is a need for confidentiality or the matters concern internal operational issues, we won't engage. In this case we will follow all procedures required by law to ensure that decisions are made in a lawful way.

We will always consider

- » The likely impact on, and consequences for, the environmental, social, cultural and economic wellbeing of the region;
- » Who is affected by or likely to have an interest in or to want to be involved in decision making on the issue; and what we know about their preferences for engagement;
- » The importance of the matter to us as the council, as well as to those affected;
- » The impact on Māori and their relationship with ancestral land, water, sites, wāhi tapu, valued flora and fauna and other taonga;
- » The role of Māori as kaitiaki in their rohe;
- » How to engage Māori in a way that is meaningful and appropriate to them;
- » What we already know about community views;
- » The circumstances in which the issue has arisen;
- » Options, benefits and costs (current and future);
- » The extent to which options will achieve or promote council objectives;
- » The extent to which any costs outweigh the benefits of engagement methods;
- » The impact on council's capability to fulfil its statutory responsibilities;
- » The likely impact on service delivery, levels of service or any of council's strategic assets;
- » The degree of information / research required to inform decision-making;
- » How we'll inform you of the final outcome of the decision or issue.

Defining which issues and decisions are significant

Distinguishing which decisions are significant, and which are not, is not always black and white. The significance of an issue, proposal, asset, decision or activity (referred to in this document as a "matter") lies somewhere on a continuum from low to high, and its significance will influence the level of engagement that council undertakes.

We will consider the significance of each matter on a case-by-case basis. When considering whether any matter is significant, we will consider a combination of factors as detailed in the following table:

What the matter being considered involves	Degree of significance	What this means
<p>Rates</p> <p>Setting a new rate; or</p> <p>Increasing an existing specific targeted rate; or</p> <p>Increasing an existing region-wide targeted rate by more than 2% (annually) above that previously approved in the most recent Long Term Plan</p>	SIGNIFICANT	We will consult with our communities
<p>Assets</p> <p>The transfer, replacement or abandonment of a strategic asset</p>	SIGNIFICANT	We will consult with our communities
<p>Level of Service</p> <p>A proposal to begin a new activity or cease an existing activity</p> <p>Activities as set out in the 'Groups of activities' section of the Long Term Plan 2024-2034</p>	SIGNIFICANT	We will consult with our communities
<p>Legislation</p> <p>A legislative requirement to consult</p>	SIGNIFICANT	We will consult with our communities
<p>Thresholds</p> <p>The matter triggers two or more of the following thresholds:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Is substantially inconsistent with existing policies, strategies or decisions » Incurs high capital or operational expenditure, or a financial transaction, with a value greater than \$1.3M³ » Large divisions in community interest or high levels of prior public interest » The decision is irreversible, has a high degree of risk, or significance of the decision is largely unknown » The decision has a large impact on a moderate number of people or a moderate impact on a large number of people.⁴ » An increase in emissions, or failure to demonstrate adaptation to climate change (e.g. building new facilities in a coastal hazard or flood zone) 	LIKELY TO BE SIGNIFICANT	<p>We will determine the best approach, which may be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » consult » involve/collaborate » inform
<p>Iwi and hapū</p> <p>The matter materially impacts on iwi or hapū with mana whenua, or exercising kaitiakitanga (guardianship) in the rohe/region or takiwā/area.</p>	LIKELY TO BE SIGNIFICANT	<p>We will determine the best approach, which may be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » consult » involve/collaborate » inform⁵
<p>Everyday operations</p> <p>The matter is part of normal day-to-day operations of council or is provided for in the Long Term Plan or Annual Plan.</p>	NOT SIGNIFICANT	We will follow usual decision-making procedures

3 This limit covers a single issue, asset or matter, as well as a package of the same, aligned to deliver a single outcome or objective. This limit does not apply to expenditure funded from the Investment and Growth Reserve, Regional Projects Reserve, Regional Economic Development Reserve, or changes to the council's investment portfolio. Note that these investments will need to meet the criteria of council's Investment Policy, pursuant to section 102 of the Local Government Act.

4 As a guide: a moderate number of people is considered to be 4000-8000, and a large number of people is considered to be greater than 8000

5 Determination of best approach is to occur in consultation with council's Māori Relationships Team in the first instance. Consideration about whether and how to inform, engage or consult with potentially affected iwi or hapū may include: the involvement of the Te Taitokerau Māori Advisory Committee and/or Te Kahu o Taonui Iwi Collective, existing memorandums of understanding with specific hapū or iwi, Mana Whakahono ā Rohe (iwi or hapū participation arrangements), and Iwi and Hapū Environmental Management Plans that have been lodged with council and recognised by an iwi authority.

Every report to the council or decision-making body will include an assessment of the significance of the matter, the degree of engagement proposed, the engagement plan proposed and a clear recommendation.

Strategic assets

A strategic asset (as defined by the Local Government Act 2002) means an asset or group of assets that the local authority needs to retain if it is to maintain its capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that it determines to be important to the current or future well-being of the community.

The Northland Regional Council's strategic assets as defined in this policy are:

- » its interests in Marsden Maritime Holdings Ltd and the Northport shares held by Marsden Maritime Holding Ltd.
- » the Awanui river scheme;
- » Hopua te Nihotetea (the Kotuku Street Dam in the Whangārei urban rivers scheme) and the land which the dam structure occupies;
- » the Kāeo stopbank scheme;
- » the Panguru flood scheme;
- » other river scheme assets as they are constructed.

A decision to transfer the ownership or control of a strategic asset to or from the regional council can only be taken if it has been provided for in its Long Term Plan and, therefore, will be the subject of the Local Government special consultative procedure.

Reviewing this policy

Council intends to review this policy every three years as part of its Long Term Plan process.