

Significance and Engagement Policy

Statement of proposal

September 2026

Summary of information

Proposal for the review of the Significance and Engagement Policy 2018 (the policy)

Wellington City Council (the Council) proposes to amend its Significance and Engagement Policy 2018 as required by section 34 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025. The Council has also taken the opportunity to comprehensively review the policy.

The process and timeframe for the review are outlined in the following table:

Activity	Timeframe
Approval of the Statement of Proposal for consultation	24 September 2026
Public consultation	1 October – 22 October 2026
Council hears oral submissions and decides whether to adopt the proposed policy	26 November 2026
The Significance and Engagement Policy 2026 comes into force	1 December 2026

Have your say

Please let us know what you think about the review and proposed changes to the Significance and Engagement Policy 2018.

You can:

- make a submission online at <https://www.letstalk.wellington.govt.nz/review-wellington-city-councils-significance-and-engagement-policy>
- download a submission form from the Council website and email it to policy.submission@wcc.govt.nz, or you can return this form to Wellington City Council by Freepost to the address on the form. You can also deliver them in person to the Council offices at 2 Harris Street, Wellington

If you wish to make an oral submission to councillors, please indicate this on the submission form and ensure that you have included your contact details. We will contact you to arrange a time for you to speak.

Written submissions open on 1 October 2026 and close on Thursday, 22 October 2026.

Background

1. The policy is a statutory requirement under section 76AA of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA02). LGA02 also enables the policy to be amended from time to time.
2. The current policy was adopted in 2018. It provides that Council will review the policy every three years or as required. The policy can be viewed here [Significance and Engagement Policy - Plans, policies and bylaws - Wellington City Council](#).
3. The water reform programme (through section 34 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025) requires the Council to amend the Significance and Engagement Policy to suit our changed role in water services.
4. The Council has also been developing the Strategic Engagement Approach to establish a shared, organisation-wide system for engagement. The approach is intended to strengthen engagement across the Council, so communities have clearer, fairer and more meaningful opportunities to participate, and decision-makers receive better evidence about community experience, knowledge and priorities.
5. The purposes of the review are to:
 - a. fulfil Council's statutory obligations related to water reforms
 - b. align the policy with the Strategic Engagement Approach
 - c. clarify the framework for assessing the degree of significance
 - d. ensure consistent use of the term "significant"
 - e. map engagement activities proportionate to degree of significance

Proposed changes and rationale

6. Initial review finds that the current policy largely contains a significance assessment, approach for engagement and management of strategic assets, as required by the LGA02. It is agreed that the policy has been generally working as intended.
7. However, there is an opportunity to substantially revise its content, structure and formatting. Specific amendments are discussed below.

Clarify the policy purpose

8. The policy does not contain a specific purpose section. However, the Introduction section contains the purpose of the policy as "to explain how the community might be engaged in various types of decisions", which is not totally in line with the statutory statement of policy purpose provided in LGA02.

9. Officers consider that the policy purpose should better align with section 76AA (2) of LGA02. We propose that the purpose of the policy is to fulfil the Council's statutory obligation under LGA02, specifically to set out:
 - a. how the Council and community will identify and decide the importance of different proposals and the decisions to be made
 - b. when, how and how much the community will be involved in decision-making processes and other matters
 - c. which important assets are determined and managed as strategic assets by the Council.
10. To achieve the purpose, the revised policy sets out:
 - a. the Council's general approach to and criteria for determining the significance of proposals and decisions
 - b. the Council's engagement principles and general approach in line with the newly developed Strategic Engagement Approach
 - c. an updated list of strategic assets to reflect the changed roles of the Council for water services.

Significance assessment

11. Schedule 1 of the current policy is the matrix for assessing the degree of significance for determining the engagement approach. The combination of both significance assessment and engagement approach makes the matrix complicated and difficult to navigate. The assessment of significance is not comprehensive, and the engagement approach does not reflect good practice.
12. It is proposed that the schedule be separated into two tables in the revised policy – one focusing on significance assessment (Table 1), one focusing on engagement approach proportionate to the degree of significance (Table 2). In Table 1, the significance assessment criteria have been revised to better reflect the statutory definition of significance provided in LGA02.

Undertaking engagement

13. The Council's approach to the engagement aspect of the current policy covers early engagement and informed engagement with inclusion of the IAP2's (International Association for Public Participation) Public Participation Spectrum. It also discusses how the Council engages, engagement with Māori, principles of consultation and the special consultative procedure. Officers consider that this section should be updated to reflect the changed best practice for engagement, as well as align with

the newly developed Strategic Engagement Approach, to provide better guidance for engagement to achieve better decisions and improved trust and confidence.

14. For example, the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is a globally recognised framework designed to help organisations determine the level of public involvement in community engagement initiatives. It is currently under global review and is likely to change. In addition, the Council does not use the spectrum explicitly across the Council's resources and it will not be included in the Strategic Engagement Approach.
15. Therefore, officers propose to remove the IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum, reference the five guiding principles for engagement of the Strategic Engagement Approach, and redevelop Table 2 for engagement expectations by degree of significance. Together they will provide much more comprehensive guidance based on best practice in engagement.

Update the strategic assets

16. The current policy provides a schedule of strategic assets, including three water services assets (the sewage collection, treatment and disposal system, the land drainage system, and the water supply system) in part 8.
17. To comply with section 34 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025, Officers propose to update this part by removing the water service-related assets from the list, and replacing them with 'the shareholding in Tiaki Wai', to suit our changed role in water services. In addition, the reference of "water supply network assets" has also been deleted.

Other amendments to the policy

Diagram for engagement in decision-making process

18. The current policy provides a diagram under the section "Making it work in practice". While it was intended to outline the engagement requirements in the decision-making process, it focuses on the consultation criteria. This has caused some confusion rather than providing guidance. Officers also consider that the diagram needs a more meaningful heading and better structure.
19. Officers have revised the diagram to outline the indicative engagement requirements and practice associated with a proposed decision. It is moved to the end of the engagement section for better structure and flow.

Other editing and amendments

- 20. The policy document has been revised with a simpler and clearer structure, and plain language.
- 21. Part 4 of the policy concerns policy review. Officers consider it better to place this section at the end of the policy document, along with a new table for version history.
- 22. Unclear or incorrect references in the current policy have been corrected, if applicable in the revised policy.

Summary

- 23. The policy document has been rewritten to reflect the extent of changes to be made and is appended as follows.

Significance and Engagement Policy 2026

Introduction

1. A significance and engagement policy is a statutory requirement under the Local Government Act 2002 (the Act).
2. Wellington City Council (the Council) has reviewed and amended the Significance and Engagement Policy 2018 to suit the Council's changed role in water services under the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025.
3. The Significance and Engagement Policy 2026 (policy) was adopted by the Council on 26 November 2026.
4. The purpose of the policy is to fulfil the Council's statutory obligation under the Act, specifically to set out:
 - a. how the Council and community will identify and decide on the importance of different proposals and the decisions to be made
 - b. when, how and how much the community will be involved in decision-making processes and other matters
 - c. Which important assets are determined as strategic assets by the Council.
5. Key definitions of commonly used terms in the policy are provided in Appendix 1.

Significance assessment

6. The Council is responsible for making decisions on behalf of the communities it serves. Significance refers to how important a decision is, how much attention it needs, or what process should be followed for the decision. Significance should be viewed as a scale from a low degree of significance to a high degree of significance.
7. The Council must determine the degree of significance of a proposal or decision by considering the likely impact of the proposal or decision on the current and future wellbeing of the city, the impact on the community, and the capacity of the Council to perform its role, as well as any financial impacts.
8. The Council will use the following criteria for assessing the degree of significance of a proposal or a decision.
 - a. the impact on the service level
 - b. the level of community interest or impact

- c. the consistency with existing policy and strategy
 - d. the financial impact.
9. The key factors to consider under each criterion are set out in Table 1. The Council will assess the degree of significance of a proposal or decision on a case-by-case basis and determine the degree of significance of a proposal or decision to be high, medium or low.

Table 1: Assessment of significance

Criteria	High significance	Medium significance	Low significance
Impact on service level	Major change to service including stopping or starting a service Major impact on the community sustainability or resilience Major legal or operational risks	Noticeable change of a service Moderate impact on specific groups in the community Moderate legal or operational risks	A nominal or no alteration of a service Minor impact on a small number of people Negligible or no legal and operational risks
Community interest or impact	Identified historical or current significance to mana whenua Strong public interest Significant divide in community views on the proposal Large impact on many people or a significant impact on a specific group	Moderate community interest or impact Limited disagreement or concern Unlikely to generate widespread controversy	Low community impact or interest Unlikely to attract attention beyond those directly affected Minimal concern or opposition expected

Consistency with existing policy and strategy	Strongly inconsistent with current policies/ strategies Difficult to reverse once decision is made	Decisions involve some diversions from existing policy and strategy Changes are manageable and can be adjusted if needed	Consistent with current policies and strategies Easy to be reversed Is a strong logical step from a prior decision
Financial impact	High capital or operational cost A financial transaction with a value of greater than 10% of rates revenue in the year of the decision	Medium level of operational cost or financial transaction (1-10% of rates revenue in the year) Requires changing priorities of resources but does not create major financial risk	Minimal or no transfer of ownership or control of assets Can be accommodated within existing budgets Low or no financial risk
Examples	The Long-term Plan Decisions to transfer strategic assets to or from Council Building major new roads Local Alcohol Policy Regional amalgamation	New policy development or policy change with substantial impact on stakeholders Works on main roads and action plans Creation of a neighbourhood playground	Routine policy review without substantial impact Redevelopment of community halls Park improvements Footpath and road repairs Digitisation of hard copy books

Adopting an event sponsorship policy

10. The Council will be guided by the above criteria in assessing the degree of significance of a proposal or decision.
 - a. If the proposal or decision triggers two or more of the criteria of high significance, the proposal or decision will be deemed to have a high degree of significance.
 - b. If the proposal or decision triggers two or more criteria of low significance, the proposal or decision will be deemed a low degree of significance.
 - c. If the proposal or decision does not meet enough criteria for either high or low significance, the proposal or decision will be deemed a medium degree of significance.
 - d. Where the significance is unclear against any of the criteria, the Council will treat the proposal or decision as being a high rather than lower degree of significance.
11. The Council will use the significance degree, alongside the Strategic Engagement Approach, to inform how and when to involve the community.

Undertaking engagement

12. Engagement plays an important role in informing Council decision making. The Mayor and Councillors have a responsibility to ensure there is effective community engagement. The Council's Community Boards are also responsible for communicating and engaging with local communities.
13. The Council has developed the Strategic Engagement Approach, establishing the Council's vision, engagement principles, engagement lifecycle, design standards and organisational expectations for engagement. This section should be read alongside the Strategic Engagement Approach.

Guiding principles for engagement

14. The Council follows this set of principles to guide its general engagement practice.
 - a. Working in partnership under Te Tiriti o Waitangi
 - b. Genuine and meaningful engagement
 - c. Ensuring transparent and accountable processes
 - d. Enabling inclusive, fair and accessible participation
 - e. Building and sustaining relationships.
15. These principles are elaborated in detail in the Strategic Engagement Approach. They apply to every engagement activity undertaken under this policy. Any

future amendments to the Strategic Engagement Approach should be reflected in this policy to maintain one organisational source of truth.

16. Where the Council is required to or chooses to undertake consultation, the statutory principles of consultation in section 82 of the Act will apply.

General approach to engagement

17. The Council's approaches to engagement reflect a spectrum of participation, ranging from providing information through to more active forms of public involvement. Some forms of engagement, such as consultation, are statutory requirements under the law.
18. The Council will determine the appropriate level of engagement based on the significance of the decision, including the scale and potential impact of the decision, and the level of community interest. In general, the higher the degree of significance of a proposal or decision, the more likely the Council will be to engage with stakeholders. Similarly, the higher the level of community interest, the more intensive engagement will be.
19. Table 2 provides a guide to the engagement that would typically be expected for decisions of high, medium and low significance.

Table 2: Engagement expectations by degree of significance

Consideration	High significance	Medium significance	Low significance
Purpose of engagement	Work with communities to understand issues, explore options and inform significant decisions.	Understand community perspectives and use feedback to refine proposals before decisions are made.	Keep informed and understand any local issues or concerns.
When engagement should occur	As early as possible, before options are developed, so community perspectives can meaningfully influence the direction of the project.	Before recommendations are finalised, so community feedback can influence the proposal.	Before implementation where practical, or during delivery for operational matters.
Community influence	High – Community perspectives should help shape options, understand trade-offs and inform recommendations, recognising that final decisions remain with Council unless decision-making authority has been delegated.	Moderate – Feedback should influence the refinement of proposals and recommendations.	Low – Community input may improve implementation but is unlikely to change the overall decision.
Applying the Engagement Lifecycle	Apply the full Engagement Lifecycle, including early planning and relationship-building through to	Apply each stage of the Engagement Lifecycle. Allow sufficient time for planning,	Apply the Engagement Lifecycle in a way that is proportionate to the decision. Some stages may be

	engagement, decision-making, evaluation and reporting back.	engagement, analysis and reporting back.	simplified depending on the scale and complexity of the project.
Examples of suitable engagement methods	Hui, Talanoa (a traditional Pacific concept of inclusive and open dialogue), co-design, deliberative forums, citizens' panels, community visioning, advisory groups and participatory budgeting. Statutory consultation may also be required.	Surveys, submissions, workshops, pop-ups, stakeholder meetings, public displays, online engagement and community reference groups.	Website updates, Let's Talk, newsletters, letters, emails, signage, webinars, targeted conversations and information sessions.
Typical planning effort	High – Engagement should be built into project planning from the outset and adequately resourced.	Medium – Allow sufficient time to design engagement, communicate effectively and analyse feedback.	Low – Engagement can usually be planned within existing project timeframes.
Typical planning timeframe	Three months or more.	One to three months.	Up to one month.

Table 2: Engagement expectations by degree of significance (continued)

Consideration	High significance	Medium significance	Low significance
Typical staffing	Dedicated project team with early and ongoing involvement from the Engagement Team and Communications. Specialist support may also be required.	Multi-disciplinary project team with Communications and Engagement support.	Small project team, with Communications and/or Engagement advice as required.
Indicative resourcing	High	Moderate	Low
Engagement planning requirements	A comprehensive Engagement Plan is expected and should be developed early in the project.	An Engagement Plan is generally expected.	A documented engagement approach may be appropriate depending on the project.
Reporting back to participants	Provide comprehensive reporting on what was heard, how community input influenced the decision and, where relevant, why particular suggestions or preferences could not be adopted.	Explain what was heard, what was decided and how feedback influenced the proposal.	Inform participants and affected communities of the outcome where appropriate.

Examples	Long-term Plan, major infrastructure projects, city-wide strategies, significant policy changes and decisions involving strategic assets.	Service reviews, neighbourhood projects, local transport improvements, park upgrades and community facility improvements.	Routine maintenance, operational improvements, minor renewals and local operational changes.
Engagement Team involvement	Early involvement is expected to ensure engagement is well designed, coordinated and proportionate to the significance of the decision.	Early involvement is recommended to support engagement planning and design.	Seek advice where needed, particularly where there is uncertainty about the appropriate approach.

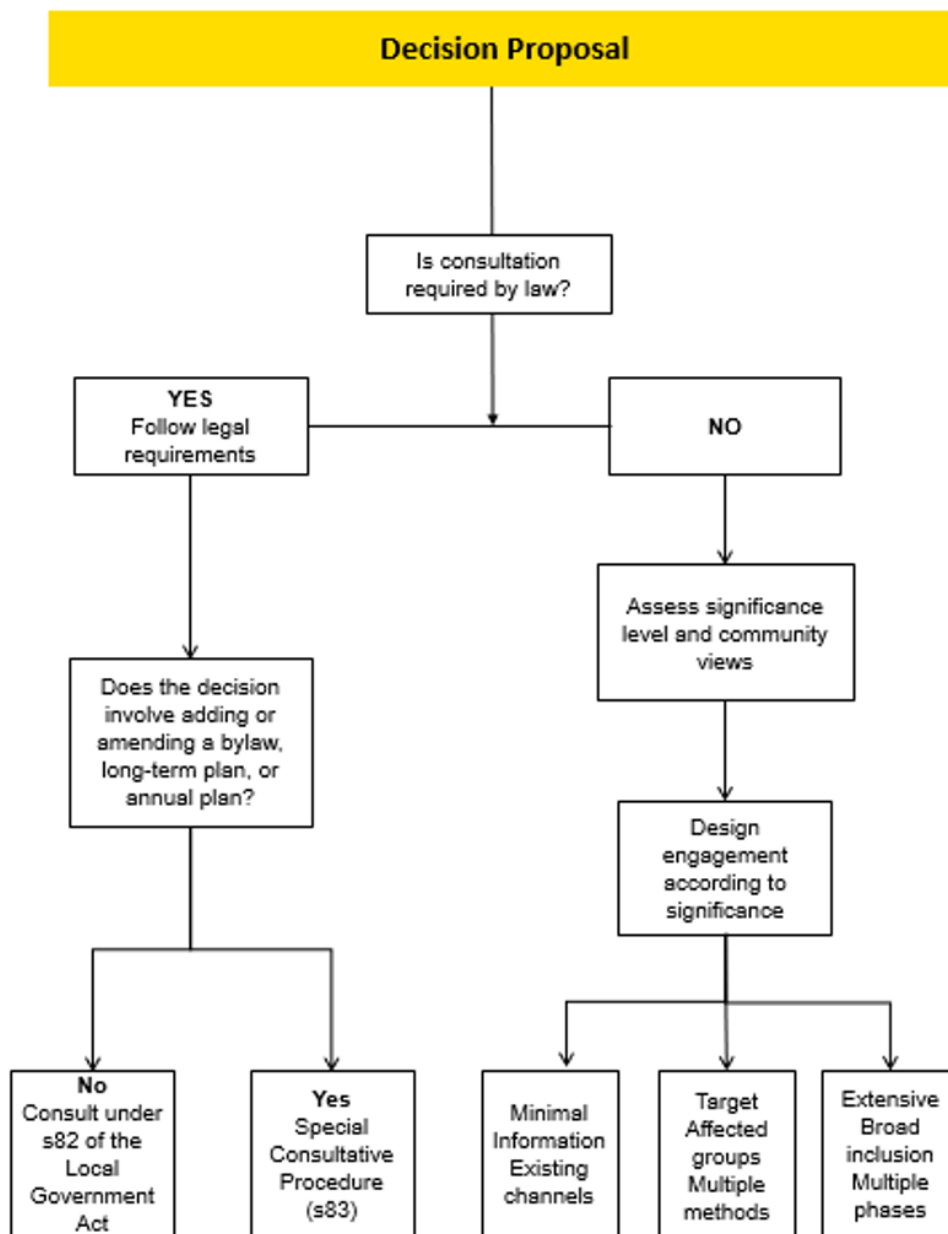
20. In deciding the approach and required extent of engagement, the Council will also consider known community preferences, including preferred channels, accessibility needs, cultural context, language needs, timing, location, and whether online, written, in-person, deliberative, or targeted engagement is most appropriate. The Council may use previous engagement, relationship networks, demographic information, community feedback, and advice from mana whenua, community boards, advisory groups, and engagement staff to identify those preferences.
21. The Council will undertake engagement to the level that is reasonably practicable, taking into account the benefits, costs, risks and practicality of the matter. The Council will endeavour to avoid doing engagement that is clearly disproportionate to the decision being made.

Consultation as a special form of engagement

22. Consultation is one form of engagement. Where legislation requires consultation, Council will comply with the Act, including section 82 consultation principles in the Act and the Special Consultative Procedure where applicable.
23. When carrying out consultation, the Council will follow these principles of consultation (from section 82 of the Act):
 - a. identify people who will or may be affected by, or have an interest in, the decision
 - b. provide them with reasonable access to relevant information in an appropriate format on the process and scope of the decision
 - c. encourage people to give their views
 - d. give people a reasonable opportunity to present their views in an appropriate way
 - e. listen to, and consider those views, with an open mind
 - f. after the decision, provide access to the decision and any other relevant material.
24. Where the Act requires the Council to consult on a particular draft policy or decision, the Council will prepare and make available:
 - a. a description of what it intends to do, and the reason
 - b. an analysis of the practical options (with advantages and disadvantages)
 - c. a draft of the policy or relevant document (or details of the changes to any policy or document).
25. The Council must use the special consultative procedure for some plans and processes including:

- a. adopting or amending a long-term plan (LTP)
 - b. adopting, amending, or revoking bylaws of significant interest to or impact on the public (for all other bylaw matters, the Council will consult following the principles in section 82 of the Act)
 - c. adopting, amending or revoking a local alcohol policy
 - d. setting rates
 - e. as required by other legislation, such as reviewing the Dangerous and Insanitary Buildings policy under the Buildings Act 2004.
26. In these circumstances the Council will develop a statement of proposal and other information that meets the requirements of section 82A of the Act, making this available to the public, allowing submissions for a period of at least one month, and will consider all submissions, including providing an opportunity to present their views to the Council through spoken interaction, including using an audio link or an audio-visual link where appropriate or sign language, prior to making decisions.
27. Where consultation is not legally required, Council may still undertake engagement where this will improve decision-making.
28. In summary, the Council's engagement approach in the decision-making process can be illustrated by Figure 1.

Figure 1: The Council's engagement approach in the decision-making process



29. Council Business Units should work with the Engagement Team to:
- assess the degree of significance of a proposal or decision
 - determine the appropriate level and methods of engagement
 - prepare engagement plans for medium and high significance decisions
 - evaluate engagement and share lessons learned.

Strategic assets

30. The Council manages a range of assets on behalf of the community. The Act requires this policy to list the strategic assets determined by the Council.

Legislative framework

31. Strategic assets are defined in section 5 of the Act and are an asset or group of assets that the Council needs to retain in order to maintain the Council's capacity to achieve or promote any outcome that is important to the current or future well-being of the community. This includes:
- a. any asset or group of assets listed in accordance with section 76AA(3) of the Act by the Council
 - b. any land or building owned by the Council and required to maintain its capacity to provide affordable housing as part of its social policy; and
 - c. any equity securities held by the Council 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."
32. According to the Act, the Council has listed its strategic assets which are determined to be important to achieve its community outcomes. In addition, assets or groups of assets are listed as strategic if the Council's ownership or control is essential to the long-term provision of the associated service.
33. Any decision that 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 through the LTP process, in accordance with section 93E of the Act.
34. The Council will responsibly exercise its governance responsibility as a member of Tiaki Wai's Partners' Committee, to implement commitments previously made to establish a regional water entity from 1 July 2026. Under the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025, water supply, wastewater and stormwater networks have been removed from the Strategic Assets List, as they are no longer managed by the Council. The Council's shareholding in Tiaki Wai has been listed as a strategic asset instead.
35. From 1 July 2026, the decision-making and engagement on significant water service matters sits with Tiaki Wai. Tiaki Wai will generally lead engagement and consultation for significant water service-related matters. There are limited circumstances in which the Council, as one of the shareholding councils, may

consult on its behalf, or undertake a joint consultation in line with the respective policies.

Group or Whole-of-Asset Approach

36. The Council takes a group or whole-of-asset approach, except the shares in Wellington International Airport. This means that adding or removing small parts within a group usually doesn't change the overall importance of that group.
37. For example, "roading assets" and "reserve assets" mean the full network of roads or all reserves taken together. So, if the Council gains new land for a road or a park (for example as a result of subdivision), that would be considered standard day-to-day management of assets.
38. Sometimes the Council can sell or transfer part of a bigger group of strategic assets without following the LTP process if the remaining assets still allow the Council to achieve its overall goals.

Examples include:

- a. decisions to facilitate the development of the waterfront in accordance with the Waterfront Framework (April 2001) or other similar policy for the waterfront
- b. disposal of former roads, provided that the Council has followed the road stopping processes under the Public Works Act 1981
- c. disposal of individual reserves, provided that the Council has followed the procedures in the Reserves Act 1977 or the Local Government Act 2002 for areas managed as reserve but not covered by the Reserves Act. The Wellington Town Belt Act 2016 does not allow removal of land from the Wellington Town Belt except under the provisions of the Public Works Act 1981.

Schedule of Strategic Assets

39. The Council owns the following strategic assets under section 5 of the Act:
 - a. equity securities in Wellington International Airport Limited
 - b. public rental housing held by the Council.
40. The Council has determined the following to be strategic assets:
 - a. shareholding in Tiaki Wai
 - b. the roading network, including the public transport infrastructure system and pedestrian networks
 - c. the shareholding in Wellington Cable Car Limited

- d. the library service
- e. swimming pool facilities
- f. Ākau Tangi and network of recreation centres
- g. community centres
- h. waterfront land and assets held on trust by Wellington Waterfront Limited for the Council
- i. all the land and buildings in the area within Te Ngākau Civic Square Precinct, as defined in the Wellington City 2024 District Plan
- j. the buildings and collections of the Wellington Museum, City Gallery, Colonial Cottage Museum, Wellington Cable Car Museum and the Carter Observatory
- k. St James Theatre, Opera House, and the Embassy Theatre
- l. artwork and literature collections, including public art and collections held by libraries
- m. reserve land, including the Wellington Town Belt, land held under the Reserves Act as well as land used for parks, cemeteries, gardens, sports fields and recreational areas
- n. the core data set used to deliver Council services
- o. the Council's brand, Absolutely Positively Wellington - Me Heke ki Pōneke
- p. Wellington Zoo
- q. the assets of Zealandia – the Karori Sanctuary Trust which are owned by the Council
- r. Kiwi Point quarry
- s. Southern Landfill.

Policy review and version history

41. This policy will be reviewed within five years from the effective date or as determined by the Council.
42. Version history of the policy is provided in the following table.

Table 3: Version history of the policy

Version	Time to be effective	Time to review
Significance and Engagement Policy 2026	December 2026	December 2031 or otherwise determined
Significance and Engagement Policy 2018	February 2018	August 2025
Significance Policy 2003	2003	2009

Appendix 1: key definitions

Term	Definition
Community	Community refers to all Wellington residents, mana whenua, ngā mātāwaka, businesses, community groups, workers, students and others who are connected to Wellington and may be affected by Council decisions.
Consultation	Consultation is a structured engagement process undertaken in accordance with the Act. The Council proposes specific changes, provides relevant information, invites feedback from affected and interested parties, and considers that feedback before making a decision. While all consultation is a form of engagement, not all engagement is consultation.
Council	It means Wellington City Council. It may mean a Council Committee with delegated authority, but does not include individual councillors or staff without proper authorisation to act.
Engagement	Engagement is a planned and ongoing process through which the Council works with people to understand their experiences, perspectives, knowledge and aspirations, and to involve them in shaping projects, services and decisions. The engagement lifecycle outlined in the Council's Strategic Engagement Approach describes how engagement will typically be undertaken.
Significance	It has the same meaning as that of section 5 of the Act. That is the degree of importance of the issue, proposal, decision, or matter, as assessed by the Council according to this policy.
Significant	It has the same meaning as that of section 5 of the Act. That is, a proposal, issue, decision or matter has a high degree of significance.

The Council follows the criteria specified in this policy to determine the level of significance of a proposal, issue or decision to inform its engagement approach.

‘Significant’ should be distinguished from the term ‘major’ used for project classification in the Investment Delivery Framework, which is also referenced in the Council’s Terms of Reference and Delegation.

Stakeholder	It is used to broadly describe individuals, groups or organisations with a specific stake or direct interest in a Council decision or activity, often due to their roles, responsibilities, or potential to be impacted. As well as the community, non-community stakeholders include other councils, industry bodies (like Local Government New Zealand), and central government agencies.
Strategic asset	It has the same meaning as that in section 5 of the Act.
