

Public Submissions Policy

Policy Owner:	Strategy and Corporate Planning Manager
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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Submissions are an important part of Waikato District Council's (Council) decision-making process. Council frequently engages and consults with the public on proposals or matters affecting the community, particularly if those decisions are significant.

Submissions are one of the main ways Council can be better informed of community views on an issue and consider them as part of their decision-making.

Following the direction of Section 82 of the Local Government Act 2002, where abusive, insulting, derogatory or objectionable submissions are received, Council staff will consider redacting the offensive segments (or, in some cases the whole submission) prior to public release on our website.

The reasons for this are:

- to protect private information or the privacy of any targeted individuals;
- to adhere to ethical standards;
- to maintain a professional reputation;
- to foster constructive and meaningful community engagement;
- to discourage submitters from sending harmful content; and
- to avoid harm to the community and staff that may arise from publishing offensive submissions.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 This policy establishes guidelines for receiving, reviewing, and managing submissions to ensure that all content aligns with the values of respect, inclusivity, and constructive communication while protecting the integrity of Council discussions and public engagement.

The policy provides clarity around the process for receiving submissions/feedback on engagements and consultations carried out in accordance with the Local

Government Act 2002 (LGA) and outlines Council's process for acceptance of late submissions/feedback (if accepted at all).

This policy helps provide assurance to submitters that their feedback and submissions are treated consistently and fairly.

3 Application

- 3.1 The policy applies to any organisation, member of the public, elected members, and Council employees making a submission on a consultation put forth by Council.

This policy relates to the receiving and processing of all written, verbal, and digital submissions received through Council consultation and engagement processes, including submissions received under the Local Government Act 2002 (including Annual and Long-Term Plans). The principles in this policy may also be used for other areas of legislation, which require formal submissions to be made to Council (i.e., Reserves Act 1977).

It does not cover formal submissions under the Resource Management Act 1991, where a separate process is required by legislation.

This policy also does not apply to submissions that Council, or staff, make to consultations not undertaken by Waikato District Council.

4 Definitions

Consultation	process generally required by statute or triggered by the Significance and Engagement Policy. This process is generally timebound, transactional and asking for feedback on a Council proposal, to enable citizen participation. This process aids and informs decision-making.
Defamatory language/ content	a term used to describe statements or content that are untrue, slanderous, or libelous, and that can cause real damage to a person's reputation.
Discriminatory language/ content	Words, phrases or content that tends to stereotype individuals, groups, races, or nationalities. Words to treat someone unfairly or put them at a disadvantage based on their race, age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability.
Engagement	a term used to describe the process of listening to inform decision making, and is often informal, fluid and built on relationships. This process involves seeking input from or involving the community, particularly those affected by or interested in a

	decision, to inform and assist in the process of developing proposals.
Formal feedback	a structured, planned, and documented way of communication. Council usually refers to this as a submission.
Informal feedback	casual, spontaneous, unscheduled form of communication.
Offensive language/content	language that is intended to upset or embarrass people, or that is harmful, hurtful, or discriminatory. Offensive language could include swearing, vulgarisms, discriminatory language, sexual expletives, and be based on factors like race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or sexual orientation.
Redacted	to obscure, censor or edit (confidential/sensitive parts of text) before publication or distribution.
Threatening language/content	language/content that expresses a sense of danger, harm, or aggression towards a person or group. It could be verbal or written, and could include intimidation, force, or an attempt to manipulate.
Unredacted	not having had sections censored or obscured.
Waikato District Council	also referred to as "Council", "we", "our" or "us".

5 Policy Statements

5.1 What is a submission?

A submission is formal feedback to Council from an individual or an organisation/group in response to a proposal or matter, upon which a decision is required by Council. These consultations will have specified opening and closing dates within which feedback can be received.

A submission does not include ad-hoc or informal feedback provided to Council. This includes comments received on Council social media platforms or comments made in the wider media or non-Council social media platforms. However, copies of comments made on Council's social media posts that directly relate to a submission may be provided to decision-makers for wider context during deliberations. Elected members can choose to have some regard for these comments during deliberations.

5.2 Who can make a submission?

Anyone can make a submission regardless of their age or place of residence. You don't need to be a ratepayer or live in the Waikato District, to make a submission. Submissions can be made by individuals or representatives of an organisation, group, or agency.

5.3 Public documents

Submissions received by the Waikato District Council are public documents, whilst personal contact details and demographic information may be redacted from any publicly available copy, the submitter's name will be published, unless the submitter requests otherwise.

Relevant Council employees will have access to unredacted versions of submissions as outlined in our Privacy Policy. Submissions will be kept in accordance with the Public Records Act 2005.

5.4 Accepted submission methods

Council provides submission forms in a range of formats which are available online or in hardcopy.

Submissions can be received:

- online via our website;
- by email;
- by post to Waikato District Council, Private Bag 544, Ngaaruawaahia, 3742;
- hand delivered to our Customer Service Centre at 15 Galileo Street, Ngaaruawaahia, 3720; or one of our offices/libraries (click [here](#) for a full list of addresses);
- orally.

5.5 Accepted formats and languages

- written or spoken in English or te reo Maaori;
- recorded as video or audio files.

Submissions can also be presented to Council in te reo Maaori or New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). The process for translating submissions will be outlined to submitters at the time the submission is received. However, if you are planning to speak to your submission in te reo Maaori or NZSL at a hearing, please send an email to consult@waidc.govt.nz at least **ten working days** prior to the hearing.

Council can provide assistance for people who need help to make a submission.

Please note: guidance on the content of a submission cannot be provided by Council staff or elected members.

5.6 **Minimum criteria for submissions**

For a submission to be valid and considered, it must include:

- First and last names.
- Organisation (if you are submitting on behalf of your business or organisation).
- If the submitter wishes to be heard.

Optional information

Occasionally, during designated consultation periods, the Council may request demographic details such as age, gender, and location. This information, collected in compliance with the Privacy Act 2020, will be used solely for statistical or research purposes and will not be published.

5.7 **Submission content conditions**

Council reserves the right to remove from consideration any submission, in part or in full, that contains content that is determined to be of the following nature:

- Contains offensive language including profanity;
- Discriminatory, or defamatory;
- Personal threats or harassment of Council or staff members (any potential threat will be referred to Council's Zero Harm Manager, relevant People Leader, and potentially referred to the New Zealand Police);

Additionally:

- Anonymous submissions will not be accepted.
- All submissions must be legible (staff are not responsible for misinterpreting a semi-legible submission).
- If a specific elected member or employee name is referred to within a submission made by another person, that name will be redacted. Roles/titles will not be redacted.
- If the submission does not make specific reference to the topic(s) outlined in the consultation document or statement of proposal, or if they are not relevant to the topic(s) being consulted on, they will be considered 'out of scope.'
- Pro-forma submissions (e.g. multiple submissions with identical content) will likely be presented to decision-makers as a single submission with all submitters' names and a tally at the top. These submissions may not all be made publicly available on our website, rather a single version of the submission with a tally and submitter names will be displayed. However, all submissions will still be counted individually.

5.8 Submitters who wish to be heard

In the case of consultations with hearings, submitters who have stated they wish to be heard will be notified of the start date, time, and locations of the hearing as early as practically possible before the hearing commences.

Speakers will be given the opportunity to present in person or online.

Hearings will be open to the public and will be livestreamed via a relevant platform.

Submitters may be allocated a speaking time and a set length of time to cover the main points of their submission. Prior to, or at the beginning, of the hearing, the chairperson will outline how the hearing will be conducted. This may include who may speak, at what time, and for how long.

Speaking times:

- Individual submitters will generally be allocated 10 minutes to present to elected members, which includes time for questions and answers.
- Community Boards/Organisations will generally be allocated 15 minutes to present to elected members, which includes time for questions and answers.
- Additional time may be granted, at the discretion of the Chair of the Hearings Committee/Panel.
- Where an individual has made a submission as part of a group or organisation, and as an individual, they may be able to speak to their individual submission at a separately allocated time.

6 Withdrawing or Late Submissions

All publicly notified engagements / consultations will specify a period for receiving feedback with a clear closing date.

Any submissions, or modifications to a previous submission, received after the date specified will be considered "late."

6.1 Withdrawing your submission

If you wish to withdraw your submission you should do so within the consultation period, this can be done by submitting a written request instructing the withdrawal of the submission.

If you wish to withdraw your submission after the consultation period has closed, this will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and may depend on whether the hearings and/or deliberations have occurred.

6.2 **Late submissions**

A late submission is any submission or modification to previously submitted feedback received after the indicated consultation closing date and time. For postal submissions, this is any submission post-marked after the consultation's closing date.

Acceptance of late submissions will be at the discretion of the Chair of the Hearings Panel/Committee. In considering whether to accept late submissions, the Chair will consider whether:

- the submission is received at a practical point in the process (e.g. before hearings begin, and with sufficient time for the matters raised in the submission to be summarised and considered by staff); and
- the submitter will have an unfair advantage over others.

Where a 'late submission' is refused, and where it is possible to do so, the submitter will be advised.

Submissions received after the start of any related hearing will not be accepted.

7 **Relevant/Related documents**

7.1 This policy shall be read in conjunction with Council's:

- Trust and Confidence Strategy.
- Significance and Engagement Policy.
- Privacy Policy.

7.2 This policy was developed referencing:

- Local Government Act 2002.
- Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.
- Privacy Act 2020.
- Reserves Act 1977.
- Public Records Act 2005.

8 **Policy review**

This policy shall be reviewed at five-yearly intervals or as otherwise required by the Chief Executive or Strategy and Corporate Planning Manager.