

Governance Rules (targeted review)

Community engagement
summary report

August 2022

1 Overview

This document provides a summary of community and stakeholder feedback on proposed changes to Bayside City Council's Governance Rules.

A targeted review of Council's Governance Rules was required to enable meetings to be held electronically — commonly known as 'virtual meetings' — or in person. This change stems from new provisions in the Local Government Act 2020 relating to electronic Council meetings.

Other minor changes were also proposed, including:

- removing a requirement for a person to attend a Council meeting to have their public question read out and answered
- recording which Councillors voted 'for' or 'against' each agenda item in the meeting minutes
- removing gendered language.

Community engagement on the proposed changes was undertaken from 28 July – 10 August 2022 (inclusive) and received 23 contributions.

Key findings

There was strong support recorded for all proposed changes:

- 74% supported keeping Council and Planning Committee meetings as in-person meetings (by default) and using electronic meetings for lower-level interest matters affecting only a small section of the community
- 74% supported removing the requirement for a person to be present at a Council meeting to have their public question read out and answered at the meeting
- 91% supported recording in the meeting minutes which Councillors voted 'for' or 'against' each agenda item for every vote (not just when a division is called).

Next steps

Council will consider community feedback and revised Governance Rules for adoption at its 20 September 2022 meeting.

2 Definitions and scope

Engagement was conducted to understand the level of community support for proposed changes to the Governance Rules. This was a targeted review, noting community engagement already undertaken on the Governance Rules in 2020 and 2021.

The table below informed the engagement scope and was published as part of the Engagement Plan Overview on Have Your Say project webpages.

Table 1: Scope of influence

Negotiables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The targeted areas of the Governance Rules under review.
Non-negotiables	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The broader Governance Rules – this is not a review of the Governance Rules in their entirety.

Table 2 lists a generalised understanding of the community members and stakeholders identified as having an interest to be considered in this consultation, and the respective level of influence.

Table 2: Community and stakeholder assessment

Stakeholder / community	Impact	Interest	Influence
Individuals with interest in specific Council agenda items/decisions	M	M	Consult
Individuals with broad interests in the business of Council and governance	M	M	Consult
Individuals with interest in a Council agenda item(s) who are uncomfortable speaking in a public setting	M	H	Consult
Previous speakers at Council meetings	M	M	Consult
Planning and Amenity Permit Applicants (supporters and objectors)	M	M	Consult
Community groups/associations/organisations	M	M	Consult
General Bayside community	L	L	Consult

3 Consultation process

3.1 Consultation methodology

Project timelines

- 28 July – 10 August 2022: Community engagement period
- 20 September 2022: Council will consider community feedback and proposed amendments to the Governance Rules at its meeting on Tuesday 20 September at 6.30pm.

Engagement program

The engagement process was open to all Bayside community members, which includes those who live, work, study or visit the municipality.

The engagement plan for the project considered the project's complexity, level of change/impact and reputational risks, and was published on Have Your Say.

The following engagement activities were undertaken:

- Project information through Council's *Have Your Say* digital engagement website, including opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback
- Phone, post and email correspondence to Governance office
- Printed survey and consultation materials available on request.

Table 3: Engagement activities undertaken

Details	Activity
28 July – 10 August 2022	Online engagement website Have Your Say Project information on proposed changes to the Governance Rules (161 visits, 132 visitors)
23 survey contributions 3 project followers	Downloads of proposed Governance Rules (41) Question and answer forum (No questions received)
28 July – 10 August 2022	Correspondence with Governance office and Councillors

3.2 Communications

It is estimated that communications via Council channels reached more than 11,000 community members.

The engagement was promoted in via the following methods:

- Have Your Say engagement website project pages (164 views, 129 visitors)
- Email notification to Have Your Say members (1,146 recipients)
- Email to previous Governance Rules project subscribers (30 recipients)
- Council's website news article (138 views)
- Council's weekly e-newsletter *This Week in Bayside* (10,345 recipients)
- Social media post 28 July 2022.

Media coverage

There was no media coverage of this consultation.

4 Participant profile

Participant profile data was recorded in survey responses and shown in the table below.

All survey participants lived in Bayside, with 52% self-nominating as ratepayers. One quarter of participants also work, study or own a business in Bayside.

Most online survey respondents were aged over 60 years (14, 61%). Sandringham, Brighton and Black Rock were overrepresented, and there were no participants from Cheltenham or Highett.

Table 4: Age, gender and suburb of participants and population profile

	Demographic	Bayside 2021 Census	Participants (%)
Gender	Male	47.8%	43.5%
	Female	52.2%	52%
	Unknown	-	-
	Other identity	-	4.5%
Age	18-24	7.8%	-
	25-34	7.8%	8.7%
	35-49	19.4%	13%
	50-59	15.7%	17.4%
	60-69	12.1%	26.1%
	70-84	12.2%	34.8%
	85+	3.4%	-
	Undisclosed	-	-
Suburb	Beaumaris	12.8%	13%
	Black Rock	6.2%	13%
	Brighton	23.7%	35%
	Brighton East	15.6%	4%
	Cheltenham	3.9%	-
	Hampton	13.6%	4%
	Hampton East	4.9%	4%
	Highett	7.6%	-
	Sandringham	11.8%	26%
	Outside Bayside	-	-

5 Consultation findings

The following section summarises the key themes apparent in community feedback on proposed changes to the Governance Rules. Themes apparent in the feedback are generally presented as statements in the tables. Where a topic or theme had more than one mention, the number of mentions is specified in brackets.

5.1 Support for actions

A clear majority of survey participants supported all proposed changes to the Governance Rules.

5.2 Online meetings

Participants were asked if they support keeping Council and Planning Committee meetings as in-person meetings (by default) and using electronic meetings for lower-level interest matters affecting only a small section of the community. 23 responses were received and 19 comments.

Most participants were supportive (17, 74%) for reasons of accountability, enabling non-verbal communication (body language), and the facilitation of discussion.

However, some participants (6, 26%) felt that meetings should be online for COVID-related reasons or to enable greater attendance. There was also support for hybrid options in the future among this group.

Sentiment Community feedback theme* (number of mentions)

Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-person meetings impose more accountability (2) • In-person meetings convey emotions/body-language (3) • Discussion is needed and occurs with direct conversation (2) • Strikes the right balance: saves travel time and enables relevant voices heard • Important to include all stakeholders and this can be achieved via hybrid meetings • Zoom not the same as in person and is less flexible • Allows flexibility and useful if someone is sick • Decisions need to be made when everyone is fully focused on the matter (2) • Virtual meetings for some issues and when necessary, if transparent • Community has the right to be present and present their case in person • An efficient approach
Oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's not take a step back. Use technology to facilitate what used to be in person. • Hybrid meetings are more accessible for everyone • COVID and other infections here to stay; need to be more flexible for safety. • Hybrid meetings provide a safer environment for everyone within the community. • I believe the online participation may offer more access for some ratepayers • An online component allows so many more people to attend (parents of young children, people with disability, shift workers etc).
Out of scope	<p>All meetings should be open to the public</p> <p>Issue with bin schedule change</p>

5.3 Requirement to attend meeting to ask a question

Survey participants were asked if they support removing the requirement for a person to be present at a Council meeting in order to have their public question read out and answered at the meeting. 23 responses were received and 18 comments.

A majority (17, 74%) were supportive of the proposed change, primarily to ensure accessibility for everyone who wants to ask a question to a meeting.

Some participants (6, 26%) were opposed to the removal of the requirement, however, associated comments suggest there may have been some confusion about the intention of the proposed change. The removal of the requirement means that community members can choose to attend the meeting or not.

Two participants were unsure about the proposed change.

Sentiment Community feedback theme* (number of mentions)

Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility for all people (9); including parents of young children, people with disability, shift workers, time constraints, illness • Need to be more flexible; many reasons why a person cannot attend (5) • Some residents may be intimidated by presence at a Council meeting (2) • Helps to ensure full representation • Must be a choice whether to attend or not
Oppose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person asking question has the right to ask directly and obtain a reply • Person should attend and hear the Council's response • Constituents have a right to be present at Council meetings
Unsure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Person if not attending in person should be able to attend virtually and be able to hear/see discussion and debate.

Out of scope

- People lodge support or objection to a proposal. Councilors have access to this information so no need for it to be repeated in person
- Social media in this instance can be useful
- I don't trust what is happening in Bayside; Councillors have own agendas.

5.4 Voting record

Participants were asked if they support recording in the meeting minutes which Councillors voted 'for' or 'against' each agenda item for every vote (not just when a division is called)? 23 responses were received along with 20 comments.

Participants very strongly approved of this proposed change with 91% supportive (21), and one not sure. One participant was opposed, however, this option may have been selected in error as the associated comment was highly supportive.

Sentiment Community feedback theme* (number of mentions)

Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community members need to know which councillors support particular issues (9) • Increases transparency (7) and accountability (3) • Confirms if Councillors vote as promised when elected (3) • Councillor directly held responsible for their decision and views (3) • Supports democracy (2) • Maintaining a record will support factual discussions at a later date
Unsure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anonymity may encourage a more honest response

5.5 General comments

Participants were asked if they have any other feedback about the Governance Rules, with 14 community members providing a response, as summarised below:

Topic Community feedback theme* (number of mentions)

General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No further comment (9) • Clarifying electronic meeting rules is important to ensure fairness and equity • Confidential Information Item 2.3 is unclear • Be wary of changing in person meetings - personal contact is essential for Council decision making • I hope this is just the start of a 'reform process' that enhances all aspects of local governance • I am totally against this proposal
Hybrid meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most probably save money by doing meetings in a Hybrid format
Gender equity / accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing more inclusive gender terms makes sense • Documents needs to be rewritten in clearer, simple language • Provide better access for the public to ask questions and provide input.

6 Project Evaluation

6.1.1 Engagement

Stakeholder reach targets were achieved:

- Broad participation spread across the municipal demographics
- Previous Council meeting speakers/written statement submitters and stakeholder community groups provided feedback

Engagement targets for the Have Your Say webpages were that:

- 20% of visits would last at least one active minute (exceeded, 39%)
- 10% of visits would have at least two actions performed, such as moving around the project page or clicking on links (exceeded, 34%)
- 5% of visits had at least one contribution made (exceeded, 14%)

Participation in the engagement program for the targeted review of the Governance Rules was lower than recorded for the community consultations undertaken in 2020 and 2021 on the Governance Rules. This is likely because the proposed amendments were clearly articulated in communications and generally supported by the broader community.

Survey participants were highly satisfied with the consultation process and materials, with all participants selecting they had the required information to participate, and it was very (74%) or mostly (26%) easy to find/understand.

The Engagement Plan Overview for this project was published and is available to view at: yoursay.bayside.vic.gov.au/governance-rules-targeted-review/EPO-GovernanceRules

7 Appendix

7.1.1 Have Your Say online survey

Do you support keeping Council and Planning Committee meetings as in-person meetings (by default) and using electronic meetings for lower-level interest matters affecting only a small section of the community?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure
- What is the reason for your response? (This question is optional)

Do you support removing the requirement for a person to be present at a Council meeting in order to have their public question read out and answered at the meeting? This means attendance at the meeting is optional.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure
- What is the reason for your response? (This question is optional)

Do you support recording which Councillors voted 'for' or 'against' each agenda item in the meeting minutes for every vote (not just when a division is called)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I'm not sure
- What is the reason for your response? (This question is optional)

Do you have any other general comments in relation to the proposed changes to the Governance Rules? [Open comment]

- ☐ **Do you consent to your comments being published in the Community Engagement Report for the consideration of Council?**

About you

These questions are to help us understand the sections of our community who have provided feedback through this consultation.

- ☐ **Connection to Bayside**
☐ **Gender**
☐ **Age Group**
☐ **Suburb**

Did you have the information you needed to provide your feedback on the Governance Rules?

- ☐ Information was very easy to find/understand
☐ Information was mostly easy to find/understand
☐ Information was mostly hard to find/understand
☐ Information was very hard to find/understand

Anonymous or postal submission

If you would like to make a submission by post or anonymously you may contact the project officer directly through their contact details above or send a submission marked 'Governance Rules targeted review' by post to:

Governance Manager
Bayside City Council
PO Box 27
Sandringham VIC 3191