te kaunihera ā-rohe o
matamata-piako
district council

Matamata-Piako District Council

Kaupapahere nui me te whakawhitiwhiti | Significance and Engagement Policy 2026

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Contents

1. Te Kaupapa | Purpose 3
2. Te Tononga o te Kaupapahere | Application of Policy 3
3. Ngā Mātāpono | General Principles 4
4. Te Whakawhitiwhitinga a te iwi Māori | Engagement with Māori 4
5. Ngā take e whakawhitiwhiti te Kaunihera | When Council will engage 5
6. Ngā take kāre pea e whakawhitiwhiti te Kaunihera | When Council may not engage 6
7. Ētahi atu whakaritenga ā-Ture | Other legislative requirements 6
8. Whakaratonga ā Wai | Water services 7
9. Ngā kirimana motuhake a te waimarangai | Significant stormwater contracts 7
10. Ngā whakaritenga kaituku ratonga ā-wai | Joint water service provider arrangements 8

Whakaritenga | Schedule 1: How to Apply the Significance and Engagement Policy 9

Whakaritenga | Schedule 2: Significance criteria 10

Whakaritenga | Schedule 3: Engagement – what might this involve? 13

Whakaritenga | Schedule 4: Strategic Assets 14

Whakaritenga |Schedule 5: Definitions 16

1. Te Kaupapa | Purpose

1.1 The purpose of this Policy is to:

1.1.1 Enable Council and its communities to identify the degree of significance attached to issues, proposals, assets, decisions and activities; and

1.1.2 Provide clarity on how and when communities can expect to be engaged in Council decisions; and

1.1.3 Guide Council in determining the appropriate types and/or level of engagement to support robust decision-making; and

1.1.4 List the assets Council considers to be strategic assets.

2. Te Tononga o te Kaupapahere | Application of Policy

2.1 This Policy will be applied to all proposals that are likely to impact the community. It does not affect other legislation that has specific consultation requirements.

2.2 The degree of significance and the appropriate level of engagement will be considered by Council in the early stages of a proposal before decision-making occurs and, if necessary, reconsidered as a proposal develops.

2.3 Significance will initially be assessed by staff using professional judgement in reports to Council.

2.4 Council will establish the degree of significance of each issue, proposal, decision or other matter on a case-by-case basis using the considerations outlined in Schedule 2 of this Policy.

2.5 Where the significance of an issue, proposal, decision or other matter is unclear against one or more of the criteria listed in Schedule 2, then Council will treat that criterion as being more, rather than less significant.

2.6 When Council makes a decision that is significantly inconsistent with this Policy, the steps identified in Section 80 of the Local Government Act 2002 will be undertaken.

3. Ngā Mātāpono | General Principles

3.1 Council will consider engagement early in the planning process to ensure that the public can influence the decision process at appropriate stages and to ensure sufficient time to allow genuine engagement with interested and affected communities.

3.2 Any engagement Council has with the community will be conducted in good faith and in an honest, and transparent manner. Council will be clear about the scope and purpose of the engagement.

3.3 Council will receive views with openness and respect and will give those views due consideration when considering matters and making decisions.

3.4 Council will adapt how it engages with communities depending on the target audience and the needs and/or preferences of that audience.

3.5 Council will work in partnership with affected or interested groups. This may include, but is not limited to: Iwi representatives, community groups and stakeholders.

3.6 The degree of significance of a matter or decision will impact the extent of engagement, time and resources required to evaluate options and understand the views of communities.

3.7 Wherever possible, Council will maintain consistent processes of engagement so that the community can build familiarity with how and where to participate. In particular, Council will endeavour to consult the community through Council's consultation website, and Council offices and libraries.

3.8 Council will integrate and combine engagement and decision- making processes across departments, as appropriate and wherever practicable.

4. Te Whakawhitiwhitinga a te iwi Māori | Engagement with Māori

4.1 Council acknowledges its responsibilities under the Local Government Act 2002 and is committed to the inclusion of Māori in Council's decision-making processes.

4.2 Council acknowledges the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi and recognise and provide for the special relationship between Māori, their culture, traditions, land, water and taonga.

4.3 Where joint management agreements, memorandum of understanding or any other similar high-level agreements exist, these will be considered as a starting point when engaging with Māori.

4.4 Council will pay particular regard to iwi aspirations when determining the degree of significance. This is included as a consideration in Schedule 2 of this Policy.

5. Ngā take e whakawhitiwhiti te Kaunihera | When Council will engage

5.1 Council will seek public participation in the decision-making process in the following circumstances:

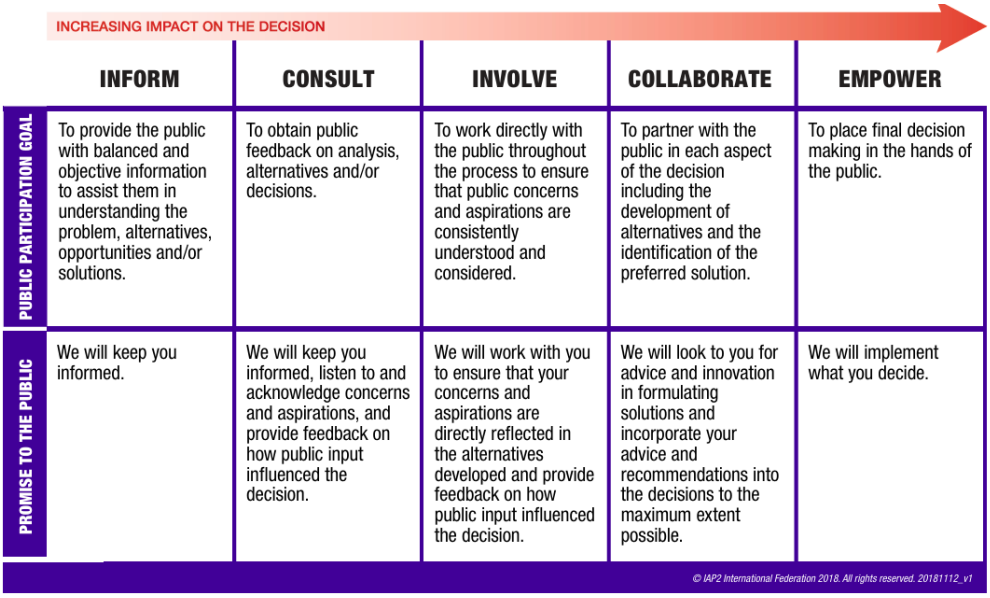
5.1.1 **When specifically required by legislation**: Council will involve the public in the decision-making process when it is a legal requirement to do so (as set out in Clause 6 and 7 of this Policy). Council will undertake engagement processes in accordance with the legislative requirements guiding them, as a minimum; and

5.1.2 **For any other matters in relation to their degree of significance**: This Policy recognises significance as a continuum – ranging from 'low' importance and impact, through to those with a 'moderate' or 'high' level of importance and impact. Subject to consideration of factors in Schedule 2.

5.2 Reference may be made to the Council's Engagement Toolbox to assist Council in undertaking genuine engagement leading to beneficial outcomes for the communities of Matamata-Piako.

5.3 Council aims to apply the Public Participation Spectrum from the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) to assist in determining the appropriate types of engagement with the community. Differing levels of engagement may be required during the varying phases of decision-making on an issue, and for different stakeholders.

Figure 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation[1]



[1] This work was created with contributions from Lewis Michaelson, Martha Rozelle, and Doug Sarno. www.iap2.org. Council has permission from the Engagement Institute to use the Spectrum of Public Participation for the purpose of this policy and acknowledges IAP2 International as the source and the custodian of this body of intellectual knowledge. It should be noted the spectrum speaks to increasing levels of *influence* in a decision - not engagement.

6. Ngā take kāre pea e whakawhitiwhiti te Kaunihera | When Council may not engage

6.1 There are times when it may not be appropriate to engage with the community on certain issues, proposals, decisions, or matters. Council may not seek public participation where the following circumstances may apply:

6.1.1 The matter is not of a nature or significance that requires public engagement; or

6.1.2 Council already has a sound understanding of the views and preferences of the persons likely to be affected or interested in the matter; or

6.1.3 There is a need for confidentiality, commercial sensitivity, or protection of personal privacy.

6.1.4 The costs of public engagement outweigh the benefits; or

6.1.5 The matter has already been addressed by Council's policies or plans, which have previously been consulted on; or

6.1.6 An immediate response is necessary because of emergency or in the interests of health and safety; or

6.1.7 Decisions are required to manage an urgent issue; or

6.1.8 There are no alternative practicable options to choose from; or

6.1.9 Entry or exit from a development agreement (private contract) under section 207A of the Local Government Act 2002.

7. Ētahi atu whakaritenga ā-Ture | Other legislative requirements

7.1 Where council is required to consult on a matter as required by legislation, this legislation may take precedence over this Policy. Legislation includes but not limited to:

7.1.1 Resource Management Act 1991 (or its replacement - Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill).

7.1.2 Civil Defence Emergency Act 2002

7.1.3 Land Transport Act 1998

7.1.4 Local Electoral Act 2001

7.1.5 Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025

8. Whakaratonga ā Wai | Water services

8.1 Matamata-Piako District Council is a shareholder in Waikato Waters Ltd. Waikato Waters Ltd is a Council-Controlled Organisation (CCO) responsible for water and wastewater infrastructure and operations.

8.2 Waikato Waters Ltd has its own policies that provide details on its consultation responsibilities on waters matters.

8.3 For the avoidance of doubt, Stormwater remains a Council strategic asset and is not subject to transfer.

9. Ngā kirimana motuhake a te waimarangai | Significant stormwater contracts

9.1 Council will, at a minimum, engage the community in accordance with the requirements set out in the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025 and/or Local Government Act 2002 (as applicable) when considering transferring ownership or control of a strategic water services asset or receiving a transfer of ownership or control of a strategic water services asset.

9.2 Council will determine whether a stormwater services contract is significant by considering the following criteria:

9.2.1 Whether the proposed stormwater services contract will have a significant adverse effect on Council's ability to meet its obligations under the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025; and

9.2.2 Whether the contract is of high value, relative to Council's revenue received from providing the service to which the contract relates, at a minimum of 10% of Council's annual operating revenue for that service; and

9.2.3 Whether the contract will create a public-private partnership; and

9.2.4 Whether a contract will be for a period of at least 15 years; and

9.2.5 Whether the proposed stormwater services contract involves any significant changes to Council's ownership or control of strategic stormwater services assets (as defined in section 4 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025 and under this Policy).

9.3 A contract will only be considered significant after considering all the criteria under Clause 9.2 in conjunction with the overall impact, value, and importance of a contract. This supports Council's intention to ensure that only contracts with substantial impact on Council's operations, finances, or strategic direction are determined to be significant.

9.4 If Council determines that the contract is significant, Council will undertake the options assessment and consultation required by sections 30 to 32 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025.

10. Ngā whakaritenga kaituku ratonga ā-wai | Joint water service provider arrangements

10.1 When considering or negotiating a proposed joint water service provider arrangement under section 26 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025, Council will determine whether the arrangement is significant for the purposes of the Act.

10.2 In making this determination, Council will consider the nature, scale and likely consequences of the proposed arrangement, and apply the criteria in Schedule 2.

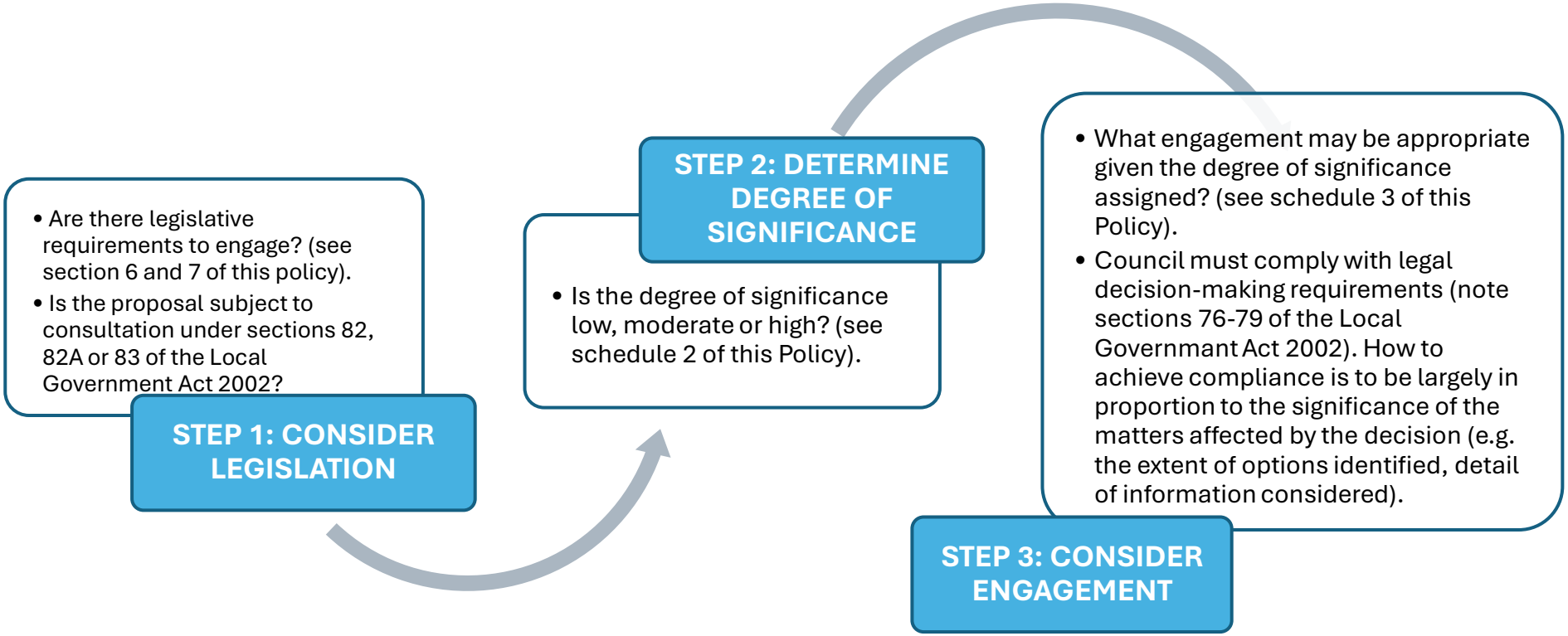
10.3 If Council determines that the proposed arrangement is significant, Council will undertake the options assessment and consultation required by sections 30 to 34 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025.

10.4 Engagement on a significant joint water service provider arrangement will be proportionate to its significance and will provide affected and interested persons with reasonable information about the proposal and a reasonable opportunity to present their views.

10.5 Where applicable, Council will also comply with the requirements of section 26 relating to consultation with, and approval by, shareholders of a water organisation.

Whakaritenga | Schedule 1: How to Apply the Significance and Engagement Policy

The degree of significance should be considered when first starting a project and revisited at key milestones along the way. This is to help guide engagement from the very beginning. Follow the below steps to understand the degree of significance and what engagement may be required.



Ensure to outline the degree of significance and proposed level of engagement in your reports to Council and clearly document the rationale to support your conclusions.

Whakaritenga | Schedule 2: Significance criteria

Council will assess the degree of significance of a proposal or decision on a case-by-case basis using the table below and determine the level of significance of a proposal or decision to be low, moderate, or high.

If any of the following criteria are met, the proposal or decision may be 'significant'. However, the criteria should be considered collectively to get to this point.

	Criteria	Low	Moderate	High
1)	**Consistency with a prior decision**	Decision or proposal is consistent *E.g. Council implements a project consulted on as part of the Long-Term Plan / Annual Plan /annual plan*	Decision or proposal is moderately inconsistent *E.g. Council makes some changes to a project previously agreed to*	Decision or proposal is significantly inconsistent *E.g. Council decides not to proceed with a major project that forms part of the Long-Term Plan that the community are expecting to happen*
2)	**People impacted**	Affects a small sub group *E.g. Removal of a street tree*	Affects large sub group(s) *E.g. Creation of a new sports field.*	Affects a wide range of people *E.g. Adoption of a Long Term Plan*
3)	**Financial impact**	Minimal financial impact *E.g. Can be funded within existing budgets and/or no or minimal impact on rates/debt levels*	Moderate financial impact *E.g. Not funded within existing budgets and/or moderate impact on rates/debt levels*	Significant financial impact *E.g. Not funded within existing budgets and/or significant impact on rates/debt levels*
4)	**Level of interest to the public**	Low public interest *E.g. Minor amendment of Council's Standing Orders.*	Moderate public interest *E.g. Annual Plan with minor amendments to what was in the Long-Term Plan*	High public interest *E.g. Long-Term Plan, Annual Plan with material amendments, or the sale of a strategic asset*
5)	**Impact on current and future generations**	Low consequences for the present and future community *E.g. Temporary road closure for upgrades*	Moderate consequences for the present and future community *E.g. Reduced library operating hours*	Large consequences for the present and future community *E.g. Transfer of a strategic asset*

	Criteria	Low	Moderate	High
6)	**Significance to Māori**	Unlikely to be of cultural significance to Māori and their relationship to culture, traditions, land, water and taonga *e.g. Minor amendments to the Easter Trading Policy where the are no known impact on Māori cultural values, land, water, taonga, or relationships.*	Likely to be of moderate cultural significance to Māori and their relationship to culture, traditions, land, water and taonga *E.g. Rating of Māori land.*	Likely to be of high cultural significance to Māori and their relationship to culture, traditions, land, water and taonga *E.g. An issue, plan or decision affecting a site, waterbody, or reserve identified by Iwi as culturally significant, including changes that may affect access, protection, restoration, or customary use.*
7)	**Alignment with iwi aspirations and/or level of opposition to an issue, proposal, decision or matter**	Matter is strongly aligned with iwi aspirations and/or support has been expressed *E.g. Bilingual signage or use of te reo Māori place names where iwi have expressed support, or where the action reflects an agreed iwi/Māori engagement plan.*	Matter is moderately aligned with iwi aspirations and/or there is no clear understanding/ consensus *E.g. A reserve management plan or recreation project where iwi aspirations are partly reflected, but some matters still need further discussion or there is not yet a clear shared position.*	Matter is not aligned with iwi aspirations and/or iwi have expressed opposition to the matter *E.g. A proposal relating to a culturally significant reserve or site where iwi have expressed opposition or concern around their aspirations for protection, access, restoration, or customary use.*
8)	**Levels of service**	Unlikely to affect the level of service of a significant activity *E.g. New bench seats in a cemetery or town centre donated from the community or an organisation.*	Likely to moderately affect the level of service of a significant activity *E.g. Moderate change to services like library opening hours, park maintenance frequency, or customer service availability that affects how the community accesses a service, but does not remove the service entirely.*	Likely to significantly affect the level of service of a significant activity *E.g. Council no longer provides a service or provides a new service that was not planned in the LTP or Annual Plan*

	Criteria	Low	Moderate	High
9)	**Reversibility of a decision**	Decision is easy to reverse *E.g. Minor correction of a resolution*	Decision is moderately difficult to reverse *E.g. Entering into a service contract, lease, or funding agreement that can be changed but may involve cost, notice periods, or disruption*	Decision is highly difficult to reverse *E.g. Transferring of strategic assets or a long-term commitment that would be costly or difficult to unwind*
10)	**Climate/ environmental impact**	Little to no impact on the district's environment *E.g. Change to an existing policy or process, with no material change to emissions, energy use, waste, land use, or climate resilience.*	Some impact on the district's environment *E.g. Upgrade of a Council facility or service that changes energy use, waste generation, stormwater management, but can be managed through standard measures.*	Significant impact on the district's environment *E.g. A major infrastructure, land-use, or service-level decision that is likely to reduce resilience or affect the district's ability to adapt to flood risks, or severe weather impacts.*
11)	**Knowledge of community views**	Community views are already known *E.g. a recent consultation or survey on the same or similar topic*	Community views are already known but may have changed *E.g. a recent consultation or survey on a similar topic but some information (like*	Community views are not known *E.g. Council has limited or no recent information about community views on a new, sensitive, or potentially contentious proposal.*

Whakaritenga | Schedule 3: Engagement – what might this involve?

Low	Moderate	High
If a matter is of low significance, Council can inform the community by providing information about a relevant decision or issue. Informing the community can facilitate openness and transparency in its decision-making. Council may use a range of engagement tools to inform the community, including but not limited to: • Newspapers • Facebook • E-newsletters • Websites • Brochures/Fact Sheets • Public Notices • Publishing the decision on Council's website	If a matter is of moderate significance, Council may decide to engage. This may involve two-way communications designed to obtain public feedback, ideas, and suggested alternatives on proposals to inform decision-making. Council may also decide it is not appropriate or necessary to engage with the community. It may be appropriate for Council to consider more participatory processes such as co-design or participatory budgeting to ensure that community views are understood and considered prior to decision-making. This may involve the use of the below tools as well as those listed in the 'low' column: • Open Days • Attending community events (e.g. market days) • Formal submissions and hearings • Surveys • Workshops/Focus Groups	If a matter is of high significance, Council must engage with the community under this Policy. Depending on the degree of significance, Council would work together with the community to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions. This would likely involve large scale publicity and may include both informal engagement/discussions with the community followed by formal consultation in accordance with the LGA. This may involve the use of the below tools as well as those listed in the 'low' and 'moderate' columns: • Partnering with the community, e.g. co-drafting, co designing • Citizens Assemblies
Examples: • Minor amendment to an existing bylaw or policy that has low community interest • Adoption of an Annual Plan that largely reflects what was agreed in the Long-Term Plan • A change to Council user fees and charges that affects a sub group, e.g. Building Consent fees. • An operational decision made by Council officers under delegation during the implementation of a Council decision. • Information campaign. E.g. food waste, dog safety, or what rates pay for.	Examples: • Adoption of or major/significant amendment to a bylaw or policy • Adoption of an Annual Plan with minor changes to what was agreed in the Long Term Plan • Proposing a moderate change to Council's level of service of a significant activity that will have a moderate impact on a sub group of the community, e.g. library opening hours. • A moderate investment, e.g. a project partially funded through other sources (an example of this may be a community playground).	Examples: • Adoption of a Long Term Plan • Adoption of an Annual Plan that proposes major changes to what was agreed in the Long Term Plan • Ceasing a Council activity • Proposing a large change to the level of service for a significant activity that will have a major impact on a large number of people, e.g. parks and open spaces. • Transfer of a strategic asset.

Whakaritenga | Schedule 4: Strategic Assets

The following is a list of Council's "strategic assets" for the purposes of section 97 of the Local Government Act 2002.

The assets listed refer to the assets "as a whole". Where a strategic asset is a network or has many components, decisions may be made in respect of individual components within the networks to transfer ownership or control, without those components being regarded as strategic assets. For example, this means it is the Stormwater Network as a whole that is the strategic asset rather than each individual pipeline, filter and pump station. Likewise, the Roading Network is a strategic asset, but small parcels of land that make it up may not be, and the purchase (or sale) of such parcels of land is unlikely to amount to a significant decision.

Assets	Detail
Parks and Open Spaces (as listed)	• Firth Tower Reserve • Hetana Street Reserve • Howie Park • Te Aroha Domain • Boyd Park • Matamata Domain • Morrinsville Recreation Ground • Matamata Cemetery • Maukoro Cemetery • Old Morrinsville Cemetery • Piako Lawn Cemetery • Te Aroha Cemetery • Waharoa Cemetery • Matamata (Waharoa) Aerodrome
Community facilities and buildings (as listed)	• Libraries • Council offices • Morrinsville Events Centre • Matamata-Piako Civic and Memorial Centre • Open Country Community Stadium, Matamata (note: majority owned by Council, with shared use by Matamata College) • Headon Events Centre, Matamata • Silver Fern Farms Events Centre, Te Aroha • Swim Zone Matamata • Swim Zone Morrinsville • Swim Zone Te Aroha • Te Aroha Mineral Spas
Elderly Person Housing	
Roading and footpath network as a whole.	
Stormwater reticulation network as a whole	
Refuse Transfer Stations	

Assets	Detail
Shareholding in Waikato Waters Limited	Council's shareholding/interest in the company (as a jointly owned Council Controlled Organisation)
Shareholding in Waikato Regional Airport Limited	Equity held in an airport company within the meaning of the Airport Authorities Act 1966

Whakaritenga |Schedule 5: Definitions

Community	Includes people or groups of people who live in the district and/or have a connection with the district and may be affected by the issue, proposal, decision, or matter subject to engagement. Includes interested parties, affected people and key stakeholders.
Consultation	Involves Council providing information relevant to an issue, proposal, decision, or matter, seeking information and perspectives that may not otherwise have been taken into account, listening to what the community has to say, considering their responses, and then making a decision. Consultation is one of the tools used in engagement.
Council	Matamata-Piako District Council
Decision	Refers to all the decisions made by, or on behalf of, Council including those made under delegation. (Management decisions made by officers under delegation during the implementation of Council decisions will not be deemed to be significant).
Engagement	The process of working collaboratively with the community to develop ideas, concepts and/or proposals in order to inform and assist Council decision-making. There is a continuum of community engagement.
Joint water arrangements	As per Part 1 (4) of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025.
Policy	Refers to the Matamata-Piako District Council Significance and Engagement Policy (this document).
Significance	In relation to any issue, proposal, decision, or other matter that concerns or is before a local authority, 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
Significant	In relation to any issue, proposal, decision, or other matter, means that the issue, proposal, decision, or other matter has a high degree of significance
Significant Activity	Is an activity (or group of activities) as listed below: • Parks and open reserves network as a whole • Library services • Cemeteries • Elderly person housing • Aquatic facilities (including spa facilities) • District event centres • Rubbish and recycling (solid waste) • The roading network as a whole • The stormwater reticulation network as a whole.
Significant Contract	means a proposed contract for water services that meets the criteria for significance set out in this Policy, having regard to the requirements of section 24 of the Local Government (Water Services) Act 2025.
Strategic Asset	Means an asset or group of assets as set out in section 5(1) of the LGA. Council's strategic assets are listed in schedule 4 of this Policy.

Sub Group	Means an assortment of people commonly recognised as a group/collection within the district's community, i.e. residents of a recognised town e.g. Morrinsville, ward or particular area (e.g.; CBD), households/businesses along the length of a major road, dog owners, users of a district reserve/facility/service, etc.