

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK REPORT

Part 1 – A better way to have your say

Community Engagement Review

6 February to 15 March 2026

Executive summary

The City of Onkaparinga is reviewing how it engages with the community when making decisions. This includes developing a new Community Engagement Policy to meet requirements under the Local Government Act 1999 and the new South Australian Community Engagement Charter and reviewing council's broader engagement approach in practice.

This project is Part 1 of the 'A better way' campaign and focuses on community engagement. Stage 1 engagement was undertaken from 6 February to 15 March 2026 to gather feedback on the draft Community Engagement Policy and to better understand how the community would like council to communicate, engage and report back in future.

A broad mix of online, printed and face-to-face techniques were used to promote the engagement and provide opportunities to participate. The Your Say Onkaparinga project page received 734 unique visitors, with 51.4 per cent visiting the platform for the first time. A total of 148 formal feedback contributions were received through the online survey, written submissions and correspondence. In addition, 223 informal comments and conversations were recorded through listening posts, community visits and outreach activities.

Overall, the findings show that community members were generally less interested in the wording of the draft policy itself and more interested in how engagement works in practice. While many participants considered the draft policy clear and appropriate as a high-level document, they wanted clearer explanation of how engagement decisions are made, how and when the community can influence decisions, and how council will report back on outcomes.

Key themes across community and staff feedback include:

- less about policy, more about practice – people care how engagement works in real life
- the need for earlier engagement, before ideas or plans are developed
- simple, plain language information and shorter feedback tools
- clearer and more visible promotion of opportunities
- a mix of online, offline and face-to-face options and more inclusive approaches that reach a broader range of people
- stronger follow-up showing what was heard, what changed, and why.

A key finding is that participation is driven more by relevance and perceived impact than by the level of promotion – when they care, they share.

Participants suggested that engagement should occur earlier in the process so the community can help shape ideas before proposals are finalised. Suggestions also included providing earlier notification of engagement opportunities and proactively contacting directly affected residents and businesses.

Engagement also highlighted a gap between requested and actual participation techniques, with low uptake of offline and face-to-face options unless engagement was convenient or actively facilitated.

Overall, the policy is broadly acceptable as a high-level document. The greatest opportunity for improvement lies in how engagement is communicated, delivered and followed up in practice.

These findings will inform refinement of the draft policy and development of an updated engagement approach to be tested in the Stage 2 engagement before being presented to Council.

Introduction

The City of Onkaparinga is reviewing how it works with the community when making decisions. This includes developing a new Community Engagement Policy and reviewing how council plans and delivers engagement more broadly.

This project is Part 1 of the 'A better way' campaign, which seeks feedback on how council engages, communicates and serves the community. This stage focuses on engagement and asks people to share their views on the draft policy and future approach.

The review is occurring to:

- align with the South Australian Community Engagement Charter (December 2025)
- respond to community and organisational interest in improving engagement.

Stage 1 engagement was undertaken from 6 February to 15 March 2026 using a range of online, paper and face-to-face techniques to reach a broad cross-section of the community.

Findings from this stage will inform updates to the draft policy and development of an improved engagement approach. A second engagement stage will test the proposed approach with the community before being presented to Council.

Community engagement purpose

The purpose of this engagement was to gather feedback to inform:

- the draft Community Engagement Policy
- council's broader engagement approach.

Community members were invited to share their experiences and suggest improvements.

What the community could influence:

- how council engages and communicates
- how feedback is provided and shared
- how engagement can be more inclusive and accessible.

What the community could not influence:

- legislative requirements under the *Local Government Act 1999* and Community Engagement Charter.

Engagement techniques

Stage 1 engagement was open from 6 February to 15 March 2026. A range of communication and engagement techniques were used to raise awareness and encourage participation across the community.

The following techniques were used to promote the engagement and provide opportunities for people to participate:

Online engagement

- Your Say Onkaparinga project page with background information, FAQs and an online feedback survey.
- Email to all Your Say Onkaparinga registered members.
- Links to the survey from other Your Say projects open at the same time (opt-in opportunity).

- Paid social media posts promoting the engagement and reminders.
- Promotion through the My Local Services app.
- Council website promotion through the Your Say platform.

Direct communication and stakeholder outreach

- Email to key stakeholder groups including resident associations, Friends groups, emergency services and schools.
- Emails through council networks including Community Connections, Sport and Recreation and Economic Development.
- Emails to local Members of Parliament.
- Internal promotion through council teams to share with their networks.
- Compass (intranet) article to inform council staff who are also residents.

Media and publications

- Article in Onkaparinga Now.
- Public notice in print media.
- Proactive communication with local media outlets.
- Listings in community newsletters such as Cherry Chatter and On the Coast (where timing aligned).

Physical promotion and printed materials

- Posters displayed at council offices and community facilities.
- Posters displayed at external community locations (for example Clarendon General Store, Clarendon Hotel and Kangarilla Post Office boxes).
- DL flyers promoting the survey, including hardcopy survey question on the reverse.
- Roadside banners placed at 10 prominent locations across the city.
- Library multiscreen displays promoting the engagement.
- On-hold phone message promoting the opportunity to participate.

In-person engagement opportunities

- Face-to-face listening posts in different areas across the city (north, central and south).
- Attendance at community events such as the Beachside Food and Wine Festival.
- Ad-hoc attendance at meetings and community locations where opportunities arose.

Hardcopy participation options

- Hardcopy surveys available and submission boxes to collect completed surveys at all council offices and the Noarlunga Library.
- Support from library and customer service staff to assist people to participate.

Targeted participation support

- Support from Youth, Positive Ageing, and Community Connections teams to encourage participation from people who may not usually engage with council.
- Targeted engagement with First Nations through embedding a question relating to engagement within the survey engaging on the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan.

Participation overview

Engagement was open from 6 February to 15 March 2026 and included consultation and active participation techniques.

The Your Say Onkaparinga platform was the primary online engagement tool and received:

- 734 visitors (51 per cent first-time users).

A total of 148 formal contributions were received:

- 124 online survey responses
- 10 written submissions (via council offices and centres)
- 13 submissions via community transport
- 1 email submission
- 0 paper surveys returned.

In addition, 223 in-person comments and conversations were recorded through listening posts and community engagement activities.

Key participation insights

Participation is driven by relevance, not promotion

Engagement participation is strongly influenced by how relevant or impactful the topic is perceived to be. Increased promotion or longer engagement periods do not result in proportionate increases in participation.

Requested techniques do not always translate to use

While participants requested more offline and face-to-face engagement, uptake of these techniques is low unless engagement is highly convenient or facilitated by staff.

Convenience and simplicity matter

Participation increased when engagement was easy to access, quick to complete and clearly explained.

Awareness remains a key barrier

Many participants were not aware of engagement opportunities or existing platforms such as Your Say Onkaparinga.

Key findings

Across all engagement activities, five consistent themes emerged.

1. Focus on practice, not policy

Participants were more interested in how engagement works in practice than the wording of the policy itself.

2. Clarity and simplicity

There is a preference for plain language, shorter surveys and easy-to-understand information.

3. Visibility and awareness

The biggest barrier to participation is not knowing engagement is happening. Improved promotion and clearer communication are needed.

4. Timing and influence

Participants want earlier engagement and clear explanation of what they can influence.

5. Trust and transparency

There is a strong expectation that council will clearly show what was heard, what changed, and why.

Elected member engagement

At the 27 January elected member session, elected members highlighted a need for engagements to be clearer about scope, influence and purpose, including what is and is not covered, why people would participate and how engagement can be both meaningful and practical.

They also pointed to opportunities to improve the current approach by using simpler language, clearer visuals and a stronger explanation of the decision-making process, while separating out planning matters where needed.

Overall, they wanted the Community Engagement Review to lead to higher quality engagement, broader and more representative participation, more visible and practical ways for people to get involved, and a stronger final approach that clearly shows how much influence the community can have.

The review also addresses the Council resolution from September 2025 to consider additional face-to-face engagement for specific project types.

Online engagement

The online community survey was designed to gather feedback on the draft Community Engagement Policy and better understand how people want to hear about, take part in and receive updates on engagement opportunities.

Overall, most respondents were less focused on the wording of the policy itself and more interested in how engagement works in practice. The strongest themes were the need for earlier and more proactive engagement, clearer and more accessible information, better awareness of opportunities to participate, stronger transparency about how feedback influences decisions, and more inclusive approaches that reach a broader cross-section of the community.

Key themes

- Most people focused on engagement as a practice rather than policy wording. Respondents expressed a desire for clearer explanations of how engagement works.
- Transparency and rounding back to participants with the outcome were strong themes.

- Earlier engagement and better promotion were important.
- Inclusion, accessibility and trust were recurring messages.

In-person engagement

In-person engagement was undertaken through listening posts, community centres and outreach activities. These conversations reinforced that:

- no single engagement technique works for everyone
- trusted local places (libraries, centres, services) can be key engagement points
- awareness of Your Say Onkaparinga is low
- offline options remain important for some groups
- people are more likely to engage when issues are locally or personally relevant.

Participants also highlighted the importance of:

- simple and clear information
- convenient participation options
- visible and recognisable promotion
- clear follow-up and explanation of decisions.

Staff engagement

Staff provided feedback through a survey, workshop and community participation.

Key insights include:

- engagement should be simpler, clearer and more proportionate
- early involvement of the Engagement team is critical
- strong value is placed on the partnership model.

Key challenges identified:

- unclear roles and responsibilities
- duplication and complexity in processes
- slow or difficult approval processes
- time pressures leading to rushed engagement.

Staff feedback aligned with community feedback, particularly around simplicity, clarity and transparency.

What this means

The findings indicate that:

- the draft policy can proceed largely unchanged as a high-level document
- the primary opportunity for improvement lies in how engagement is delivered in practice
- awareness, simplicity and transparency are critical to improving participation
- engagement should be planned based on relevance and impact, not effort alone.

Stage 2 engagement should focus on testing a clear, public-facing engagement approach rather than further refining policy wording.

Evaluation

The engagement achieved its purpose of gathering meaningful feedback to inform the review of the Community Engagement Policy and council's broader engagement approach.

A wide range of engagement techniques supported participation across the community. Feedback was consistent across online, in-person and staff engagement, indicating that the findings are broadly representative.

Key evaluation insights include:

- participation is driven by relevance rather than promotion
- awareness remains a key barrier
- requested/preferred engagement techniques do not always reflect actual behaviour
- convenience and simplicity are critical
- trust is strongly linked to follow-up and visible outcomes.

While resource intensive, in-person engagement was valuable in reaching community members less likely to participate online and reinforced the importance of meeting people where they already are.

Overall, the engagement provides a clear evidence base to inform Stage 2 and future improvements to council's engagement approach.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Community engagement outcomes

Appendix 1 - Community engagement outcomes

Participation overview

Engagement was open from 6 February to 15 March 2026.

Engagement included consultation and active participation techniques, with the community invited to provide feedback on the draft Community Engagement Policy and council's approach to engagement. A broad range of communication and engagement techniques were used to promote the opportunity and encourage participation across the city.

The Your Say Onkaparinga engagement platform was used as the main online location for information about the project and for people wishing to provide feedback digitally. The project page received 734 visitors, with 51.4 per cent of visitors accessing the page for the first time. Visitors were directed to the project page through a range of channels including direct links, social media promotion, printed materials, council communications and search engines.

One feedback tool was available on the Your Say Onkaparinga platform, where community members could complete an online survey. The survey included 4 main questions about the draft policy and some demographic questions. Participants could then choose to continue and answer 3 additional questions exploring their preferences for how they would like to be informed, participate, and be kept updated about engagement opportunities.

Supporting information was also provided on the Your Say page to help community members understand the purpose of the review and the draft Community Engagement Policy. During the engagement period 2 documents were available for download. The draft Community Engagement Policy and a printable version of the survey. The policy was downloaded a total of 105 times, and 38 copies of the printable survey were downloaded, with a total of 143 downloads recorded.

A total of 148 formal contributions were received during the engagement period, noting some contributors may have accessed multiple channels. Contributions were received through the following channels:

- Your Say Onkaparinga platform – 124 responses via the online survey
- the community transport team – accepted 13 written submissions
- council offices and positive aging centres - 10 written submissions were received across 9 locations
- email (1 written submission) to the Director Community
- paper surveys - 0 returned
- in-person comments or conversations recorded through listening posts or other engagement activities - 223 responses. .

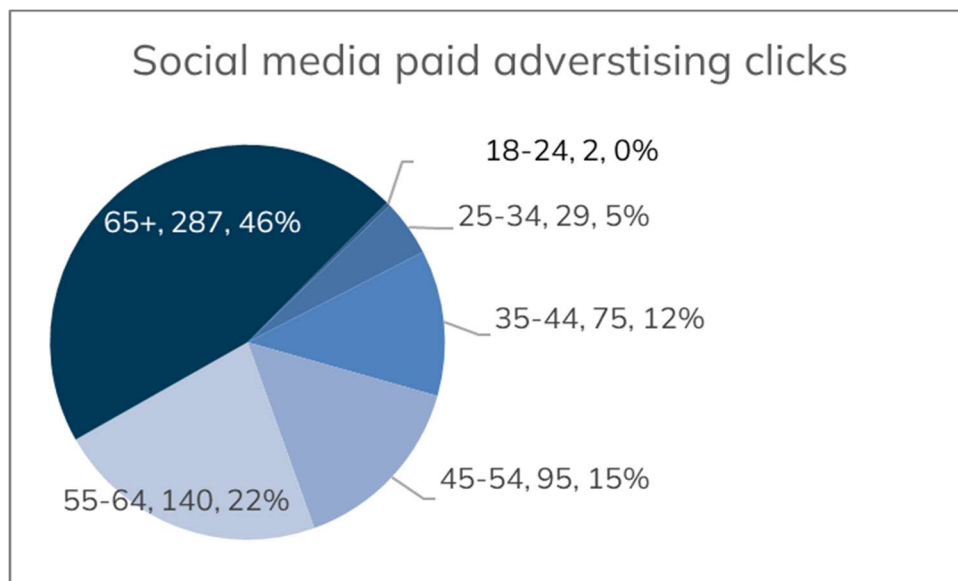
Face-to-face engagement opportunities were also provided through listening posts and attendance at community events. These opportunities allowed community members to speak directly with council staff, ask questions and complete surveys in person.

The engagement was also promoted through a range of communication channels including social media, stakeholder emails, council newsletters, posters and roadside banners.

The social media campaign comprised 7 free posts and one paid advertisement across 3 social media channels.

Facebook

Over the engagement period, an investment of \$300 into a Facebook campaign generated 628 link clicks at \$0.48 cents per click. The paid ad was seen in feeds 45,831 times and reached 14,945 people.



Over the same period, free Facebook posts generated 425 link clicks at \$0.00 cents per click. The posts generated 33,182 impressions, 65 reactions, and 55 comments. This resulted in 425 link clicks over the month.

Instagram

During the month one post was published on Instagram, this post reached 211 people, generating 3 interactions and 0 comments. The free post was viewed 254 times; Instagram doesn't allow hyperlinks in posts therefore this did not result in any link clicks.

LinkedIn

During the engagement one post was published on LinkedIn, this post reached 251 people, generating 2 interactions and 0 comments. The free post was seen in feeds 389 times with 104 video views. This resulted in 25 link clicks.

When they care, they share

This engagement process reinforced that the level of community participation in an engagement is not driven by the amount of promotion or resources applied. While promotion supports awareness, it is not the determining factor in whether people choose to participate. The primary driver of participation is whether people feel the topic is relevant to them and worth their time.

Community members are more likely to engage when they:

- feel personally or directly impacted
- have a strong interest in the topic
- believe their input will genuinely influence the outcome.

Where these factors are high, participation will occur regardless of the level of promotion.

Conversely, where impact, interest and perceived influence are low, increasing promotion or adding more engagement activities does not necessarily result in higher participation.

This reinforces that engagement planning should focus first on understanding the level of community impact and influence, and then selecting a proportionate approach, rather than if increased effort will generate increased participation.

A comparison of the Public Art Policy engagement and this engagement shows that although both were undertaken at the same time of year, the Public Art Policy engagement was promoted less heavily and open for a shorter period yet attracted almost double the level of participation.

The proportion of visitors to the relevant web pages who went on to complete the survey was significantly higher for the Public Art Policy (43 per cent) than for the Community Engagement Policy (17 per cent).

A comparison with the Public Art Policy engagement is provided at Appendix G – Comparison of simultaneous policy engagements.

Participation insight: requested vs actual participation techniques

Feedback from the community and staff consistently highlighted a desire for more offline and face-to-face engagement opportunities, including paper-based surveys, in-person conversations and direct interaction with council staff.

These options were provided as part of this engagement, including:

- hardcopy surveys available at all council offices and the Noarlunga Library
- submission boxes for paper responses
- face-to-face listening posts at multiple locations
- attendance at community events and community centre programs.

Despite providing these additional options, uptake of these techniques was very low:

- no paper surveys were returned during the engagement period
- no participants proactively attended listening posts to provide feedback
- in-person feedback was primarily gathered by council staff actively approaching community members in locations such as libraries, events and community centres.

This indicates that while offline and face-to-face engagement techniques are frequently requested, they do not necessarily translate into active participation when provided.

In most cases, participation through these techniques occurred only when engagement was made highly convenient or initiated by staff. This suggests that ease, timing and perceived relevance of the topic may have a greater influence on participation than the availability of specific engagement opportunities.

This insight reinforces the importance of:

- designing engagement approaches that are proportionate to the level of community impact and interest
- focusing on convenience and accessibility
- recognising that stated preferences for engagement techniques may differ from actual participation behaviour.

Who we heard from

Demographic information was collected through the online and paper survey only. Participants were invited to provide this information voluntarily to help council understand who participated in this engagement and whether a broad range of community members were represented.

Demographic information was not collected during face-to-face engagement activities, such as listening posts or event participation.

The following information summarises the demographic data collected through the survey responses.

Participation in previous council engagements

Participants were asked whether they had participated in a council engagement in the past 2 years. The responses below indicate a greater proportion had participated than not:

- yes – 66 per cent
- no – 34 per cent.

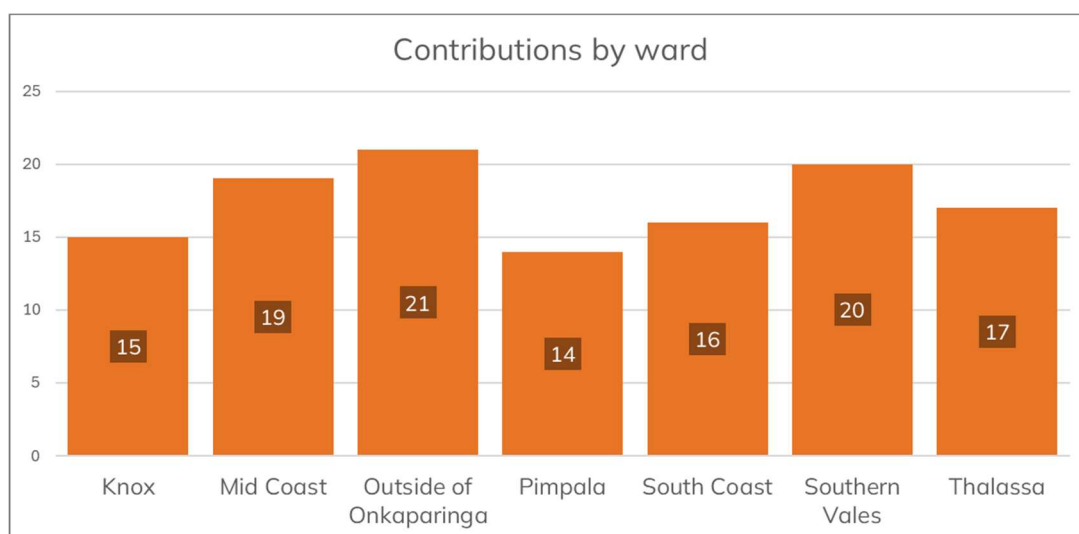
Residency status

Participants were asked about their connection to the City of Onkaparinga area.

- I live in the Onkaparinga region – 92.5 per cent.
- I own a business or work in the Onkaparinga region, but live in a different council area – 2.5 per cent.
- I own property in the Onkaparinga region, but live in a different council area – 1.7 per cent.
- I'm not currently a resident, but would like to be – 0.8 per cent.
- Other – 2.5 per cent.

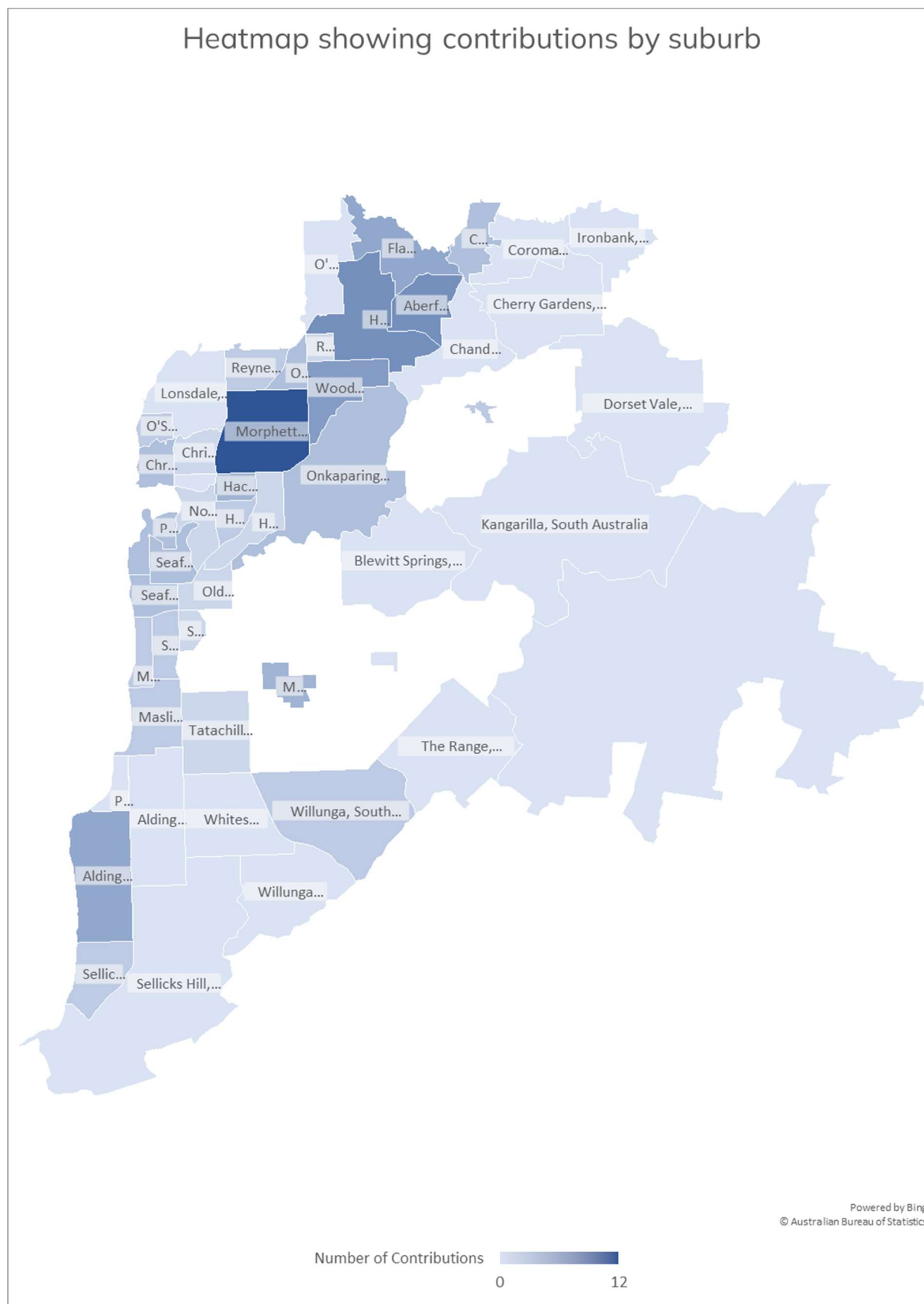
Responses by ward

Survey responses were received from across the City of Onkaparinga. The distribution of responses by ward is shown in the graph below.



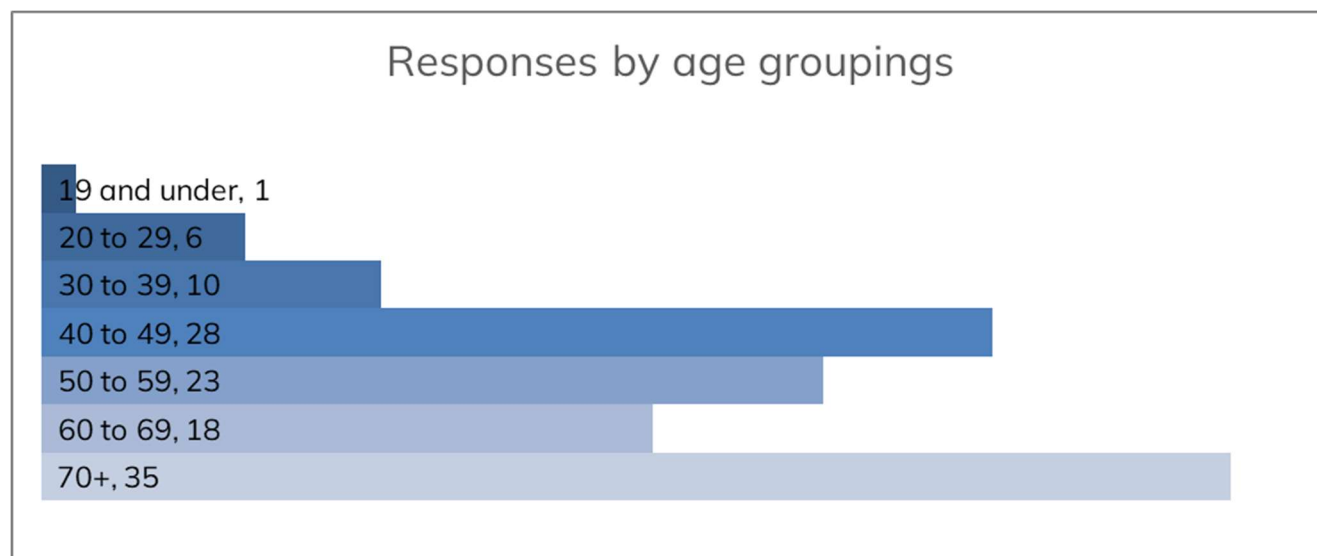
Responses by suburb

Responses were received from a wide range of suburbs across the city. A heatmap showing the geographic distribution of responses is provided below.



Age groups

Participants were asked to indicate their age group. Responses were received across a range of age groups as shown in the graph below.



People living with disability

Ten participants responded that identified as living with disability.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants

Two participants to the online survey responded that they identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

In addition to the online survey hosted on the Your Say Onkaparinga platform, we also embedded the question "How can we make it easier for you to have your say?" into the Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan online survey open at the same time.

Across the responses collected, feedback was limited but generally aligned with broader community themes. It is important to note that these responses included all the community not solely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing promotion, simple and accessible ways to provide feedback, and opportunities for more meaningful, in-person conversations. There was also interest in creating spaces for learning and respectful dialogue, particularly in relation to understanding culture and connection to Kurna land. While some participants were satisfied with current approaches, others noted the need for council to demonstrate genuine listening and consider community views in decision-making.

Themes from the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants included:

- ongoing promotion of opportunities
- simple and accessible online options
- value of in-person conversations (e.g. talk booths, forums)
- interest in ongoing education and cultural understanding
- importance of respectful engagement on Kurna land
- need to demonstrate genuine listening and consideration of feedback
- some participants satisfied with current approach.

Online community survey overview

A community survey was developed to understand community views on the draft Community Engagement Policy and gather suggestions on how the council can improve how it engages with the community. The survey was designed to capture both feedback on the draft policy and broader insights into how people prefer to hear about, participate in and receive updates about engagement activities.

The survey included a mix of open and closed questions. Participants were first invited to provide feedback on the draft Community Engagement Policy and share suggestions on how the council could make it easier for people to have their say. Participants were also asked if there was anything further the policy should include.

Several questions were included to better understand who was participating in the survey. These questions asked about participants' connection to the City of Onkaparinga (for example whether they live, work or own property in the area), the suburb they live in, age group and whether they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or as a person living with disability.

Participants were then given the option to answer three additional questions about council's engagement approach. These optional questions explored how people would like to hear about opportunities to have their say, how they would prefer to participate in engagement activities and how they would like to be kept informed about decisions and project outcomes.

The results of the survey provide insight into community awareness of council engagement, preferences for communication and participation, and opportunities to strengthen council's engagement practices. The following section summarises the key findings from the survey responses.

Overall high-level themes from community online survey

Across the survey questions relating to the draft Community Engagement Policy and how council engages with the community, several consistent themes emerged. While some respondents commented directly on the policy document, many participants focused more broadly on how engagement works in practice and how community feedback influences decisions.

The following overarching themes summarise the key messages received.

1. Many participants did not provide detailed feedback on the policy itself

A significant number of respondents indicated they had no specific feedback on the draft policy. In many cases this was because participants had not read the policy in detail, had only skimmed the document, or felt unable to comment on a formal policy document.

Some respondents noted that while the policy appeared reasonable or clearly written, they were more interested in how engagement would occur in practice rather than the wording of the policy itself.

This suggests that while policy documents are important for governance purposes, many community members are primarily interested in how engagement works in real situations and how their feedback will influence decisions.

2. The policy is generally seen as clear, but participants want more practical explanation

Several respondents indicated that the draft policy appears clear and sensible as a high-level document. However, some participants felt the policy is very high level and does not provide enough detail about how engagement will occur in practice.

Participants expressed interest in understanding:

- how engagement activities will be delivered
- how decisions are made about the method we will use (inform/consult/active participation)
- what techniques will be used for different types of projects.

Some respondents suggested that supporting materials explaining the engagement approach in plain language may help community members better understand how engagement works.

3. Strong interest in transparency and closing the feedback loop

A strong and consistent theme across responses was the importance of transparency in decision-making and communication about outcomes.

Participants indicated they would like clearer information about:

- how community feedback is considered alongside other factors
- what changes occur because of feedback
- why some suggestions may not be adopted.

Several respondents also emphasised the importance of providing updates to participants after engagement activities have concluded.

This feedback highlights the importance of demonstrating how community input contributes to council decision-making.

4. Engagement should occur earlier and be more proactive

Some respondents expressed concern that engagement sometimes occurs after ideas or plans have already been developed.

Participants suggested that engagement should occur earlier in the process so the community can help shape ideas before proposals are finalised. Suggestions also included providing earlier notification of engagement opportunities and proactively contacting directly affected residents and businesses.

These comments reflect a desire for earlier and more collaborative engagement processes.

5. Improve awareness and accessibility of engagement opportunities

Many respondents indicated that the main barrier to participation is not the engagement tools themselves but awareness of opportunities to participate.

Participants suggested council could improve awareness by:

- promoting engagement opportunities through more communication channels
- using social media, signage and newsletters
- providing information through community networks and events
- offering offline participation options for people without internet access.

Some respondents also highlighted the importance of using plain language and accessible formats so that information is easier for community members to understand.

6. Ensure engagement is inclusive and reaches a diverse range of community members

Some participants highlighted the importance of engaging with people who may not normally participate in engagement activities.

Suggestions included improving accessibility for people with language barriers, disability or limited time, and tailoring engagement approaches to reach a broader range of community members.

This reflects a desire for inclusive engagement approaches that remove barriers to participation.

7. Building trust in engagement processes

Several responses reflected broader concerns about whether engagement genuinely influences council decisions.

Participants emphasised the importance of council demonstrating that community views are listened to and considered when decisions are made.

This feedback reinforces the importance of:

- transparency
- clear communication of outcomes
- showing how feedback has been considered.

Overall observation

Across the survey responses, participants were generally less focused on the wording of the draft policy and more focused on how engagement is delivered in practice.

The most consistent messages from the community relate to:

- improving awareness of engagement opportunities
- ensuring engagement occurs early in decision-making processes
- providing clear and accessible information
- demonstrating how feedback influences decisions
- ensuring engagement reaches a diverse range of community members.

These insights provide valuable input for refining both the Community Engagement Policy and council's broader engagement approach.

In person engagement and listening posts

In addition to the online survey, in-person engagement activities were undertaken to provide opportunities for community members to share their views through direct conversations with council staff. These activities aimed to reach people who may not typically participate in online engagement and to gather informal feedback about how council can make it easier for the community to have their say.

Four listening posts were held at council libraries across 3 city locations, to capture feedback from a broad cross-section of residents. These were held at Woodcroft Library (north), Noarlunga Library (central) and Aldinga Library (south). During these sessions, council staff approached community members visiting the libraries and invited them to share their thoughts on council engagement, particularly focusing on the question of how council could make it easier for people to participate and have their say.

Additional in-person discussions were also held with community groups in more familiar and comfortable settings. Council staff attended sessions at Elizabeth House Positive Ageing Centre, Wakefield House Positive Ageing Centre and Hackham West Community Centre. Feedback was also collected through the community transport bus service, which provided a further opportunity to hear from residents who may face barriers to participating online.

The in-person comments are summarised from notes taken by Community Engagement Advisors during conversations with participants and are not verbatim transcripts.

Across the in-person engagement activities, participants consistently highlighted the importance of offering a mix of communication and participation techniques, as no single approach works for everyone. Common themes included low awareness of Your Say Onkaparinga, the importance of trusted local places such as libraries and community centres, and the need for engagement opportunities to be simple, relevant and easy to access.

Participants also emphasised the value of offline options such as letters, phone calls, hardcopy surveys and face-to-face conversations, particularly for older residents and those less comfortable online. Clearer promotion, more recognisable branding, shorter and simpler surveys, convenient local return points for paper surveys, and stronger follow-up about outcomes and decisions were also recurring themes.

Overall, the in-person engagement reinforced that people are more likely to participate when engagement feels locally relevant, accessible and worthwhile.

Elected member session

On 27 January 2026, an Elected Member session was held to present the proposed review approach and gather feedback on how council's future engagement approach could be improved.

Elected Members discussed three key questions and highlighted the need for clearer scope and boundaries, including what the engagement approach does and does not cover, and where planning matters should sit separately. They also emphasised the importance of clearly explaining the decision-making process, how engagement relates to decisions, and how much influence the community can realistically have.

Elected members also called for a simpler, more practical and more visible approach to engagement. This included using clearer language, stronger visual communication and more meaningful ways to promote opportunities and involve the community. They wanted the approach to be easier for the community to understand, supported by plain language, clearer visuals and practical tools that help explain how engagement works in real situations.

In terms of outcomes, elected members wanted the review to lead to higher quality engagement, broader and more representative participation, and more visible and accessible ways for people to get involved. They also wanted the final approach to be practical, trusted and leading practice, with a stronger focus on showing how community feedback is considered and how much influence the community can have in different decisions.

Internal staff engagement

In addition to community engagement, council staff were invited to provide feedback as part of the Community Engagement Review. Staff were asked to provide feedback on the draft Community Engagement Policy, council's community engagement approach, their experience undertaking engagement activities, and opportunities to improve internal processes, guidance and support for engagement.

Staff were able to participate through 3 engagement channels:

- an online staff survey available through the Your Say Onkaparinga engagement platform
- an in-person workshop involving staff from across the organisation
- as a resident, they could also complete the online community survey available through the Your Say Onkaparinga platform.

The workshop was attended by 21 staff nominated by managers and team leaders and provided an opportunity for participants to share their experiences delivering engagement, reflect on current practices and identify opportunities for improvement. Discussions explored both the community perspective and internal processes, with activities designed to capture insights into what is working well, where challenges exist and how council's engagement approach could be strengthened.

Across all staff engagement activities, a total of 19 contributions were received, outlined below:

- 11 responses to the online staff survey
- 4 responses to the question asking staff to step into the community's perspective
- 4 responses relating to improving internal processes and ways of working.

Across the workshop discussions and survey responses, several consistent themes emerged. Staff emphasised the need for engagement to be simpler, clearer and more proportionate to the scale and risk of projects, while remaining inclusive, transparent and meaningful for the community. Staff also noted that participation in engagement activities is often dominated by highly motivated individuals or those directly affected by projects, while many voices across the community remain underrepresented.

Staff consistently highlighted the value of early involvement from the Engagement team, noting that support during planning, delivery and reporting stages is critical to achieving effective outcomes. The partnership approach, responsiveness and expertise of the Engagement team were identified as key strengths.

At the same time, several challenges were identified. These included:

- unclear roles and responsibilities between project leads, engagement and communications
- duplication and complexity across templates and processes
- approval processes that can be slow, repetitive or difficult to navigate
- time pressures leading to rushed engagement and reduced effectiveness.

Staff also highlighted that engagement can at times feel like a compliance or “tick box” exercise, particularly when undertaken late in the project lifecycle or without sufficient time and planning.

Stepping into the community's perspective

Staff were asked to consider engagement from a community member's perspective and identify what would make it easier to participate. Key insights included:

- the importance of simple, easy to complete engagement tools, with a preference for multiple choice options over long free-text responses
- reducing the amount of reading required and using clear, plain language
- providing timely feedback on how input influenced decisions, ideally within a short timeframe
- being clear and honest about what level of influence the community can have.

These insights closely align with feedback received from the community and reinforce the importance of clarity, simplicity and transparency in engagement design.

Improving internal processes

Staff also provided suggestions on how internal processes could better support engagement delivery. Key suggestions included:

- simplifying and tailoring templates to reduce duplication and make them easier to use
- improving and streamlining approval processes to reduce delays and rework
- exploring opportunities to use existing systems (such as Customer Relations) to gather feedback
- considering the use of tools or technology, including AI, to support reporting and analysis.

Overall, staff feedback highlights the importance of clear processes, early planning, and strong collaboration between teams to support effective engagement.

The online staff survey provided an additional opportunity for staff to share feedback on internal engagement processes and operational experience delivering engagement. Staff who wished to provide feedback as community members were encouraged to participate in the community survey. Feedback collected through the staff engagement activities therefore focuses on internal processes, guidance and organisational capability to support effective engagement.

Insights from staff have been considered alongside community feedback to inform updates to the draft Community Engagement Policy and the development of the updated engagement approach, including supporting procedures, tools and guidance for staff.

Evaluation

The engagement achieved its purpose of gathering meaningful feedback to inform the review of the Community Engagement Policy and council's broader engagement approach.

A wide range of communication and engagement techniques were used, including online, printed and face-to-face approaches. This ensured multiple opportunities for participation and supported engagement with a diverse cross-section of the community.

The engagement resulted in:

- 734 visitors to the Your Say Onkaparinga project page, with 51.4 per cent visiting for the first time
- 148 formal feedback contributions through surveys, submissions and correspondence
- 223 additional comments and conversations captured through listening posts and community-based engagement.

The consistency of feedback across online responses, in-person conversations and staff input indicate that the key themes identified are well established and broadly representative of community views.

The engagement also highlighted several important insights about how and why people participate:

Participation is driven by relevance, not promotion

- The level of community participation was strongly linked to how relevant or impactful the topic was perceived to be, rather than the volume of promotion or number of engagement activities delivered.

Awareness remains a key barrier

- Many participants indicated they were not aware of engagement opportunities or existing platforms such as Your Say Onkaparinga, even when these were actively promoted.

Requested techniques do not always translate to actual use

- While participants frequently expressed a preference for offline and face-to-face engagement, uptake of these techniques was low unless engagement was made highly convenient or actively facilitated by staff.

Convenience and simplicity are critical

- Participation was more likely when engagement was easy to access, quick to complete and clearly explained.

Trust is closely linked to follow-up and outcomes

- A strong expectation exists that council will clearly communicate what was heard, what changed and why. Where this is not visible, willingness to participate is reduced.

In-person engagement played an important role in reaching community members who may not typically engage online, particularly through trusted local settings such as libraries, community centres and existing services. These activities reinforced the importance of meeting people where they already are.

Overall, the engagement has provided a clear and evidence-based understanding of community expectations. The findings confirm that while the draft policy is broadly acceptable as a high-level document, the greatest opportunity for improvement lies in how engagement is communicated, delivered and followed up in practice.

These insights will directly inform Stage 2 of the project, including testing a clearer and more accessible engagement approach with the community.

What can we interpret from these results

- The policy is broadly acceptable as a high-level document.
- The bigger community concern is how engagement works in practice.
- Stage 2 engagement should therefore focus on testing a clearer public-facing approach, not just refining policy wording.