

# Community Consultation and the 'Hard to Reach'

City of Whittlesea Case Study Report  
Thomastown Recreation and  
Aquatic Centre Strategy

Nicola Brackertz



The **Hard to Reach Project** is a collaborative research venture with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association and researchers from Swinburne University of Technology. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and partner organisations.

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# Contents

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Why the case study was chosen .....	1
<b>Who is hard to reach and why? .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Problems with hard to reach terminology .....	3
Origins and usage of 'hard to reach' .....	3
Who is identified as hard to reach? .....	4
Sampling hard to reach.....	5
<b>Legitimacy of the participation process.....</b>	<b>7</b>
Democratic legitimacy of public participation.....	8
Models of public participation .....	9
<b>Demographic characteristics: City of Whittlesea and Thomastown .....</b>	<b>12</b>
Social and Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA).....	15
<b>Community consultation at the City of Whittlesea.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>The consultation process .....</b>	<b>24</b>
Profile of the facility .....	24
Community discussion groups .....	26
Evaluation of the TRAC strategy consultation .....	28
<b>Recommendations.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Appendix 2 .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Appendix 3 .....</b>	<b>36</b>



## Introduction

This report is part of a series of case study reports for the *Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach* research project. The project is investigating how community consultation is currently practised by Victorian councils, especially in relation to multiple publics and groups that councils can find hard to reach.

The *Hard to Reach* project is a collaborative research venture, with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association, and researchers from Swinburne University. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and the Cities of Boroondara, Darebin, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moreland, Port Phillip and Whittlesea, and the Shire of Nillumbik. The eight participating councils comprise inner city as well as city fringe locations, homogenous and highly ethnically and culturally diverse populations, economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas, well established and newly developing areas, municipalities with a long-standing commitment to community consultation as well as those which are still developing their policies and practices. The range of contexts and socio-demographic characteristics reflect the attitudes and practice of community consultation as it is currently taking place in Victoria.

As part of this research, a detailed case study is being conducted with

each partner council. In order to gain a balanced insight into current practice, case studies were matched to provide examples of a range of levels of consultation:

- high level strategic planning
- place based issues
- service reviews
- issue based consultations
- consultations aimed at involving specific hard to reach groups
- community development.

The matched case studies will assist the greater *Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach* project to provide some useful resources for each of the partner councils, as well as a broader commentary and analysis of the challenges faced when councils attempt to consult with or engage their communities.

### **Why the case study was chosen**

The Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre (TRAC) Strategy was chosen as an example of a consultation about a service with place based issues in an area with high levels of disadvantage and a high proportion of residents from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

TRAC is an important community facility that is used primarily by local residents. It has wet and dry recreational spaces and is co-

located with the Thomastown Library and Community Centre in Main Street. The centre provides a service for the whole community and is significant for their health and wellbeing. TRAC is owned by the City of Whittlesea and operated through a management agreement by a contractor.

The demographic characteristics of Thomastown (highly CALD; low socio-economic status; declining and ageing population) mean that many of its residents are less likely to participate in recreational sporting activities. The literature shows that persons tend to be under-represented in most recreational sporting activities if they have poor English proficiency, are aged over 45, and have little social contact or access to transport (Stratton et al. 2005). This adds currency to the need to involve a representative sample of potential centre users so that any strategy developed for TRAC will reflect their needs and preferences and maximise health and wellbeing outcomes.

There is a degree of overlap between persons who can be difficult to involve in public consultation and those who are under-represented in recreation activities such as those offered by TRAC. This makes an investigation of how the involvement of hard to reach groups in the TRAC strategy consultation all the more relevant.

To provide a context to the case study, this report first outlines perceptions and definitions of hard

to reach groups. This is followed by the problems associated with community consultation, with reference to debates on democratic legitimacy and public participation in local government decision making.

Section 2 provides demographic profiles of Whittlesea and Thomastown and Section 3 provides a context for consultation at the City of Whittlesea. Section 4 describes the TRAC Strategy consultation and Section 5 presents findings and recommendations.

As part of the case study methodology, Nicola Brackertz, a researcher from Swinburne University, attended most of the consultation workshops; interviewed consultants as well as councillors and council staff; and reviewed relevant council documents.

## Who is hard to reach and why?

In the context of local government, hard to reach is a term sometimes used to describe those sections of the community that are difficult to involve in public participation. It is useful to take a step back and look at the usage of the term in the literature more generally, as many of the issues raised are also applicable to local councils.

### **Problems with hard to reach terminology**

There is a lack of clarity about what exactly is meant by 'hard to reach'. The term is employed inconsistently; sometimes it is used to refer to minority groups, such as ethnic people, gays and lesbians, or homeless people; it can be used to refer to 'hidden populations', i.e. groups of people who do not wish to be found or contacted, such as illegal drug users or gang members; while at other times it may refer to broader segments of the population, such as old or young people or people with disabilities (Jones & Newburn 2001: vi). In the service context, hard to reach often refers to the 'under-served', namely, minority groups, those slipping through the net, and the service resistant (Doherty et al. 2004). An alternative term used in the sampling context is 'hidden populations' (Atkinson & Flint 2001; Duncan et al. 2003), as in they are hidden from the point of view of sampling. Hidden populations may also actively seek to conceal their group identity, as

for example in the case of illicit drug users, gays and lesbians, and sexually active teens (Duncan et al. 2003).

The problem with using the term 'hard to reach' is that implies a homogeneity within distinct groups which does not necessarily exist. Thereby 'it defines the problem as one within the group itself, not within your approach to them' (Smith 2006). This sentiment is echoed by Murphy (2006).

From what has been discussed so far, it is not surprising that hard to reach is a potentially stigmatising terminology. Freimuth and Mettger (1990: 323) offer an illustrative summary of prejudices:

*Hard-to-reach audiences have been called obstinate, recalcitrant, chronically uninformed, disadvantaged, have-not, illiterate, malfunctional, and information poor.*

### **Origins and usage of 'hard to reach'**

Hard to reach is often used in the context of social marketing (Beder 1980). The aim of many social marketing initiatives, especially in the field of health, is to affect change in behaviour using marketing tools and techniques adopted from the private sector (Walsh et al. 1993). Social marketing is a consumer focused approach that believes nobody is impossible to reach; it just depends on the approach taken. Paul Vittles

commented that 'no-one is hard to reach, just more expensive to reach. It is important to put more effort and creativity in reaching these groups' (Wilson 2001: 1).

This is borne out in medical and health research where hard to reach often appears in relation to the ability of health services to reach out to certain difficult to contact (or difficult to influence using existing techniques) segments of the population (Freimuth & Mettger 1990; Walsh et al. 1993; Faugier & Sargeant 1997; Burhansstipanov & Krebs 2005). Here hard to reach are also equated with the 'under-served', which can mean that either there are no services available for these groups or, more often, that they fail to access the services that are available (Earthman et al. 1999; Barlow et al. 2005; Burhansstipanov & Krebs 2005). The reasons why hard to reach people are of such concern in the medical and educational fields is that they tend to have poorer health and educational outcomes, which is why reaching them is of particular concern to those working with young people and in youth services (Earthman et al. 1999; The Reading Agency 2006).

### **Who is identified as hard to reach?**

With the current emphasis on governance and community engagement, councils are now also focusing on those population segments that do not usually participate. Many organisations, but councils in particular, identify hard

to reach populations using demographic definitions (young people, rural people, people with disabilities, ethnic groups), but it is important to acknowledge that attitudinal aspects are a contributing factor. For example, people could be hard to reach because they think council does not care about them, does not listen or even is irrelevant to them (Wilson 2001). It is these attitudes that can be even harder to overcome than demographic aspects.

In addition to demographic and attitudinal characteristics, there are also practical reasons why some people are hard to reach. In the medical context, the most frequently reported barriers to participation in the US Head Start programme were prior commitments and schedule conflicts (Lamb-Parker et al. 2001, cited in Barlow et al. 2005).

Interviews and focus groups conducted with the partner councils to this research project identified CALD communities, indigenous, young, elderly, disabled and homeless people as hard to reach. Other groups included drug users, sex workers, those on low incomes, high rise apartment dwellers, faith based communities, businesses (traders), single parents, newly arrived residents, gay and lesbian people, homeless, problem gamblers and residents of hostels and boarding houses. Some rural populations were considered to be hard to reach, while some groups of people (in particular, those who

were asked to regularly respond to service reviews) were becoming over-consulted and increasingly reluctant to participate. To this illustrious list should be added persons who would like to have a say in local issues, but do not know how to access council processes. Also identified were unresponsive people, such as the time-poor (who are in full-time work and/or who work outside the council area); persons who have a low commitment to the local area or no vested interest in local issues (e.g. renters); and disengaged people who are disillusioned with, or feel disconnected from, the political process (Brackertz et al. 2005).

However, a list of identified groups is not necessarily a useful tool to recognise and establish relationships with hard to reach, all the more because certain groups may be hard to reach in some contexts or locations and not in others. A more fruitful approach is to define characteristics of hard to reach groups and link these to successful approaches to contact or involve them (Health and Safety Executive 1994; Jones & Newburn 2001). The wide connotations associated with and imprecise usage of the term 'hard to reach' calls into question its utility. A number of groups and population segments have traditionally been under-represented in councils' public participation. But in reality, few are hard to reach if the right approach is used.

Common to many writings is the recognition that those wishing to

involve hard to reach need to overcome their own prejudices about the people they wish to contact, while at the same time having to work to address the preconceptions (often misconceptions) of those with whom they wish to involve (Freimuth & Mettger 1990; Barlow et al. 2005; Burhansstipanov & Krebs 2005). An alternative way to view the 'disinterest' or 'lack of motivation to contribute or become involved' often associated with hard to reach groups is by emphasising differences rather than deficits. The difference thesis suggests that when people are motivated to acquire information and when that information is functional in their lives, they will make use of this. This notion has import for the sampling of hard to reach.

### **Sampling hard to reach**

In sampling, the term 'hard to reach' is used frequently in relation to the need to include certain population segments to obtain a representative sample (Messerli et al. 1995; Rhodes et al. 2004).<sup>1</sup> In relation to participatory practice in councils, representativeness is linked to the need to include all those affected by a particular issue to secure democratic legitimacy. The method and tool of public participation used will affect the representativeness of those participating. The degree to which particular groups are hard to reach

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<sup>1</sup> Discussions here relate to the inclusion of blacks, HIV positive people, drug users etc.

is context specific and depends on the population targeted, the participation method used and the issue consulted upon.

Van Meter (1990, cited in Faugier & Sargeant 1996) distinguishes extensive (e.g. descending) and intensive (e.g. ascending) data collection methodologies.

Descending methodologies (quantitative strategies executed at the level of general populations) require highly standardised questionnaires, population samples and traditional statistical analysis. These quantitative methods rely on 'representative' sampling strategies to make inferences about the whole population. Survey studies in the general population that rely on closed questions are inherently limited by the data obtained and may yield little understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is particularly limiting when exploring new or sensitive areas (Hendricks & Blanken 1992, cited in Faugier & Sargeant 1996).

Ascending methodologies, on the other hand, use qualitative sampling designs and are usually non-generalisable, but provide a high degree of insight into a social process. Typically they use snowball sampling, life histories and ethnographic monographs, with analysis adapted to suit the specific techniques employed (Faugier & Sargeant 1996). Snowball sampling is an example of a special technique that was developed to attempt to include hard to reach and hidden

populations (Atkinson & Flint 2001). It is a link-tracing methodology that is used most often for qualitative research. In essence, the technique relies on a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other or are loosely connected. The respondent is asked to name other persons who fit the criteria described by the researcher. These are then interviewed and in turn asked to nominate others who fit the criteria, and so on.

In councils, involving the hard to reach is usually done through a combination of targeting public participation tools and reaching out to communities in ways in which they are likely to respond to. However, many councils struggle to involve a representative cross-section of the community.

## Legitimacy of the participation process

To give political legitimacy to decisions made and priorities set on the basis of what the community says, it is necessary to be able to show that those involved in the consultation are representative of the municipality's population. Otherwise, results are open to criticism and complaint and can be subject to challenge on the basis that they do not reflect the interests of the wider community.

In the context of councils' public participation processes, 'representative' means those affected by the issue consulted upon. In the case of TRAC, current and potential users constitute the target audience. Therefore representation in the strictest sense would require inclusion of all current and potential users of the centre. Clearly this is not practicable. The alternative is to aim to consult with a sample of the community that mirrors the spread of age groups, genders, language and cultural groups, socioeconomic status, levels of education and employment, and interests of the target population. This, too, is no mean undertaking, as it is time, skill and resource intensive to involve a wide spectrum of people in consultation on complex issues.

This is why consultations that require wide representation are often advertised publicly, thereby (at least in theory) providing everyone with an equal opportunity to participate. In reality, those who do respond are usually people who read council publications or the local paper, are

politically aware or have a vested interest in the issue. While the participants in a publicly advertised consultation – sometimes called 'the usual suspects' – are not necessarily representative of the wider community, at least the argument can be made that others, if they felt strongly enough, could have become involved and raised their concerns.

The problem is that it is not easy to involve a large number of people. Surveys are perhaps the preferred means of eliciting information and opinion from a large sample. They appeal also because they are able to be quantified, thereby lending scientific validity and confidence to the responses received. However, especially where complex, future oriented and abstract planning is concerned, surveys are limited because they impose simple options on complex choice questions.

Workshops, meetings and other group based face to face consultation methods tend to be resource intensive and difficult to do well. Their success depends on the quality of the participants and the skill of the facilitator. The value of these forms of community consultation is that they provide deliberative forums that can be used to elicit qualitative information and cast light on why opinions are held and decisions are made. They also help council listen to people and provide assurance to participants that they are being heard.

Surveys and face to face methods are often used in conjunction. The difficulty lies in balancing the need for representation with the ability to gain deeper understanding and insight about the issues. It is often hard to decide how much weight should be given to a workshop, which provides in-depth information, as opposed to a survey, which has greater numbers of participants.

### **Democratic legitimacy of public participation**

The problem with open invitation workshops is in evaluating their place, scope and effectiveness. They attract varying levels of attendance and, in terms of representation, their profile is patchy. Theoretically this dilemma can be framed using two key dimensions of democratic legitimacy: procedural legitimation and the ability of political institutions to provide outcomes.

Procedural legitimation refers to the way in which democratic processes are conducted to secure the consent of the governed (Klausen & Sweeting 2002). The notion is linked to the fundamental tenets of representative democracy where general acceptance of political decisions is predicated on the principle that each vote counts equally when electing representatives and that, beyond elections, everybody has the same right to attempt to influence political decision making through lobbying and advocacy. In the case of public participation in local government decision making, procedural legitimation is closely linked to issues of representativeness and opportunity to become involved.

Consultations may not require full inclusion, but should at least aim to involve a representative sample of the municipality's population. In reality, due to their complexity, consultations on major policies and strategies that affect the entire municipality (e.g. corporate plan, strategic resource plan, or municipal strategic statement) are often carried out involving only a small number of community members who are often not representative of the broader demographic. Consultations that relate to a service review or an operational matter are usually aimed at a subset of the municipality's population and do not usually require full inclusion (though they may benefit from it). However, even in these instances only a small proportion of the affected citizens take part in the consultation process.

The other key dimension of democratic legitimacy is the effectiveness of political institutions, which hinges upon the ability to deliver outcomes and address emerging issues and needs as they arise (Hanssen et al. 2003; Klausen & Sweeting 2002). Here it is not so much the representativeness of public participation that counts (although representation remains an issue), but the outcomes that result.

While the two dimensions of democratic legitimacy are a useful test of the validity of public participation, decisions about doing and using the results of consultation are inevitably tempered by practical considerations. As outlined in an earlier report for the *Community Consultation and the Hard to Reach* project (Brackertz et al. 2005),

something can be learned about the desired level of community involvement in decision making from pluralistic and purpose based models of public participation.

### **Models of public participation**

As outlined in the second report to councils (Brackertz et al. 2005), there are numerous ways in which community consultation, participation and engagement can be conceptualised and evaluated.

Arnstein's (1969) 'ladder of participation' is a model that has shaped thinking about community engagement. It describes community engagement from the perspective of a community activist and places participation on a continuum of activity depending upon the range of influence that citizens have over decision making. For writers such as Arnstein, participation should involve a transfer of power from the council to the community, and ensure that final decision making is left in the hands of the various stakeholders. Arnstein argues that community engagement processes that do not make a genuine attempt to consider the views of citizens may be tokenistic or even a form of manipulation that will lead to a greater degree of cynicism from the public. Assuming open and transparent processes will automatically lead to an empowered citizenry is problematic, however, as it raises the question of where authority should lie in a system of representative democracy. It also ignores the issue of who is likely to participate and how decision making will be improved, given that providing

opportunities for participation may simply increase the power of those who already have it. Nevertheless, Arnstein rightly points out that governments should be open about why they engage the public, and should not use consultation processes to simply justify a decision that has already been made.

An example of a more pragmatic and pluralistic model, which views public participation as an activity that should be shaped by the policy problem at hand, is the influential International Association for Public Participations (IAP2) Spectrum, <<http://www.iap2.org.au/spectrum.pdf>> (Table 1). The model outlines the choices that organisations have when doing public participation, depending on the degree to which citizens are expected to be actively involved in the decision-making process. The IAP2 Spectrum is particularly useful for local authorities, because it combines the goals of public participation (such as to obtain feedback or work directly with the public) with the implicit promise this approach holds for the community (e.g. information, consultation or empowerment), thereby directing organisations to think through the public implications of their participation processes.

This shows that a genuine commitment to engage the public does not necessarily involve handing over power to those who take part. The IAP2 Spectrum takes on board the concerns of Arnstein but does not subscribe to her normative emphasis to transfer power to citizens.

The spectrum demonstrates a variety of options that organisations have when engaging their communities. At one end of the spectrum, organisations can choose to simply inform their citizens of a decision that has or will be made. At the other, they can delegate decision making to the public. The IAP2 Spectrum also suggests a small range of techniques that can be used depending upon the level of involvement required of citizens, although it should be noted that some techniques can be used for a range of engagement levels. The IAP2 Spectrum is useful for thinking about the degree to which organisations want citizens to contribute to decision making, and emphasises the need to be clear about the messages provided to the public. Nevertheless, it does little to address a range of other issues that are important to consider when undertaking community consultation. Among these is the manner in which 'the public' is invited to participate, and how information from the process is used in decision making.

**Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation**

<b>Inform</b>	<b>Consult</b>	<b>Involve</b>	<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Empower</b>
<b><i>Public Participation Goal</i></b>	<b><i>Public Participation Goal</i></b>	<b><i>Public Participation Goal</i></b>	<b><i>Public Participation Goal</i></b>	<b><i>Public Participation Goal</i></b>
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision making in the hands of the public
<b><i>Promise to the Public</i></b>	<b><i>Promise to the Public</i></b>	<b><i>Promise to the Public</i></b>	<b><i>Promise to the Public</i></b>	<b><i>Promise to the Public</i></b>
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced that decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
<b><i>Example Techniques to Consider</i></b>	<b><i>Example Techniques to Consider</i></b>	<b><i>Example Techniques to Consider</i></b>	<b><i>Example Techniques to Consider</i></b>	<b><i>Example Techniques to Consider</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fact sheets</li> <li>• Websites</li> <li>• Open houses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public comment</li> <li>• Focus groups</li> <li>• Surveys</li> <li>• Public meetings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Deliberative polling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen advisory committees</li> <li>• Consensus building</li> <li>• Participatory decision making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Citizen juries</li> <li>• Ballots</li> <li>• Delegated decisions</li> </ul>

## Demographic characteristics: City of Whittlesea and Thomastown

The City of Whittlesea is located on the metropolitan fringe about 20 kilometres to the north of the Melbourne CBD. It is a large municipality that covers

Glenvale, Humevale, Kinglake West, Mernda, South Morang, Whittlesea, Wollert, Woodstock, Yan Yean and Yan Yean South.



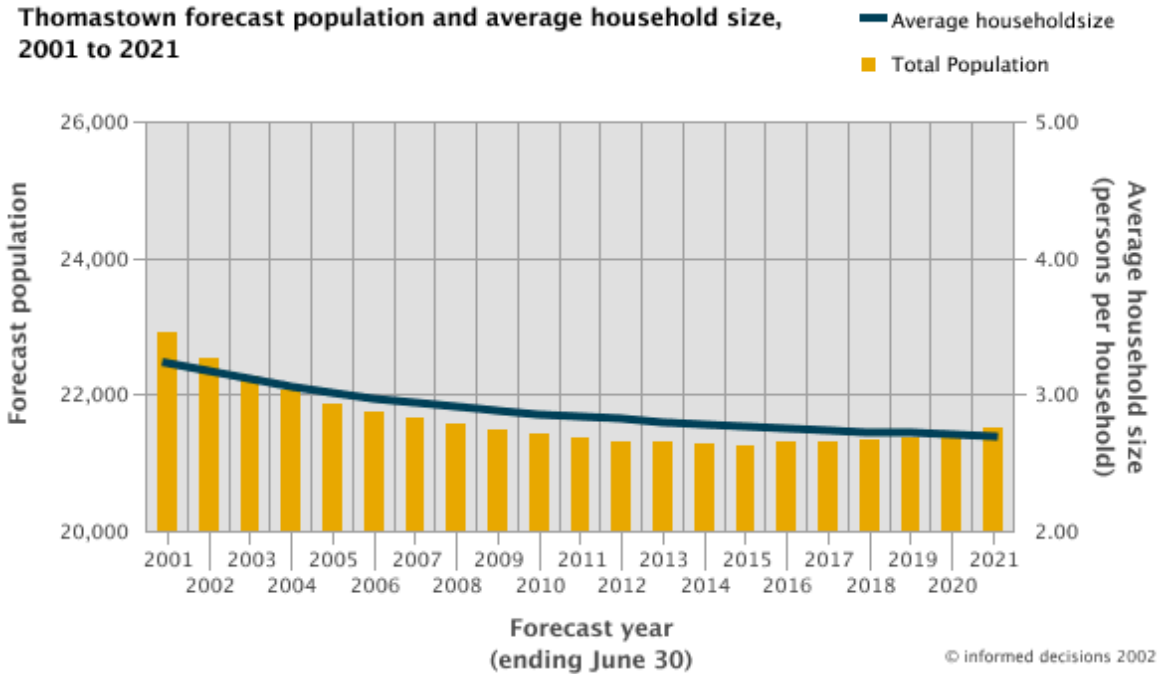
Figure 1: Whittlesea Council area (id consulting 2006a)

approximately 487 square kilometres and comprises urban as well as rural areas. The bulk of the population resides in the urbanised southern sector, comprising Bundoora, Epping, Lalor, Mill Park and Thomastown. Other localities within the municipality include Beveridge, Bruces Creek, Donnybrook, Doreen, Eden Park,

Due to its location on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne, Whittlesea confronts the challenges of providing services and balancing the needs of its rural as well as urban populations. Council faces the particular challenge of providing services equitably to its older and established areas as well as to the newer developments which contribute to its rapid population growth.

The City of Whittlesea is growing rapidly. Its current population of 130,254 (Department for Victorian Communities 2006) is forecast to increase to 240,000 by 2030 (City of Whittlesea 2006: 7), making it Victoria's fastest growing municipality. The state government has endorsed the role of the City of Whittlesea as a growth area of metropolitan significance.

However, not all areas of Whittlesea are growing at the same rate. Growth is strongly driven by major residential developments, particularly in Blossom Park, Epping, Mill Park and South Morang (id consulting 2006a: 4). Over 50% of people moving into the new growth areas are already residents of Whittlesea and there is a general residential migration trend to move north.



**Figure 2: City of Whittlesea population change** (City of Whittlesea 2006: 8)

However, some of the older established areas within the city are expected to decline in population, with many of the residents being older than the average for the Melbourne Statistical District (MSD). Based on population projections to 2021 done by id consulting (2006b), Thomastown is amongst these and experienced a small decrease in population between 1996 and 2001, the result of few dwellings being added and a decline in the average number of persons living in each dwelling.

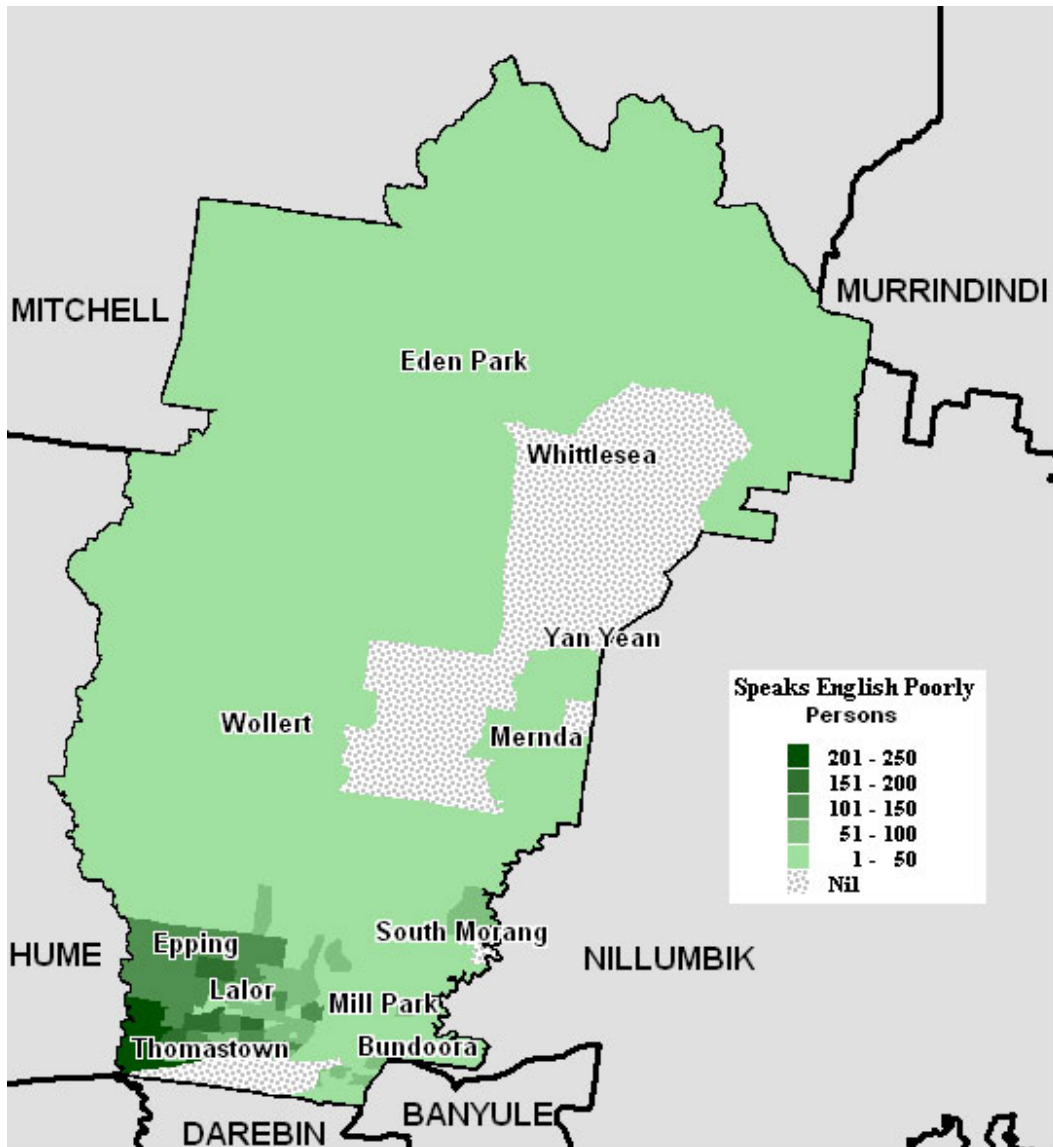


Figure 3: Distribution of speakers with low English proficiency

The population of Whittlesea is highly diverse, with residents coming from over 55 different countries of birth. 48% are from a non-English-speaking background and 46% speak a language other than English at home, most commonly Italian, Macedonian, Greek, Arabic and Vietnamese (City of Whittlesea 2006: 6). However, these cultural groups are not distributed evenly throughout the municipality, with 73.2% of the population

in Thomastown being from non-English-speaking backgrounds, compared with 14.9% in the Whittlesea township (Townsend 2006: 9). Figure 3 shows the distribution of speakers with low English proficiency in Whittlesea.

## Social and Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)<sup>2</sup>

Table 2: SEIFA rankings for participating LGAs

LGA	Population		Advantage Disadvantage		Disadvantage		Economic Resources		Education & Occupation	
	N	Rank*	Index	Rank*	Index	Rank*	Index	Rank*	Index	Rank*
Boroondara	150,233	4	1,173	1	1,122	1	1,154	2	1,180	1
Nillumbik	58,161	27	1,104	7	1,108	4	1,104	6	1,079	10
Port Phillip	77,541	25	1,135	5	1,079	7	1,114	5	1,161	4
Melbourne	57,808	29	1,145	3	1,038	13	1,115	4	1,179	2
Moreland	131,359	9	995	21	985	25	981	26	1,015	15
Darebin	123,708	13	989	22	967	26	978	27	1,008	17
Whittlesea	114,082	15	949	29	962	27	977	28	927	28
Maribyrnong	57,907	28	972	27	915	30	968	29	989	21

\* Out of 31 Melbourne LGAs

Whittlesea ranks low on the SEIFA Indexes, thereby indicating that it has high levels of disadvantage compared to the MSD.

Whittlesea ranks 29 out of 31 Melbourne local government areas (LGAs) on the *Index of Advantage/Disadvantage*, which is a continuum of advantage to

disadvantage and takes into account variables relating to income, education, occupation, wealth and living conditions. This indicates that the area has low numbers of skilled workers, high unemployment and households with relatively lower incomes compared to the MSD.

The *Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage* does not offset households in advantage against those that are

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the SEIFA indexes, refer to Brackertz et al. (2005).

disadvantaged and is therefore a better indicator of disadvantage. Here Whittlesea ranks 27 out of 31 LGAs, confirming high levels of disadvantage. The index draws on attributes such as income, educational attainment, unemployment and dwellings without motor vehicles, relatively lower educational attainment and high unemployment. On the *Index of Economic Resources* Whittlesea ranks 28 out of 31 Melbourne LGAs, indicating

relatively lower incomes and status of residential tenure (numbers owning or purchasing their own home, as opposed to renting).

A geographic mapping of the SEIFA Index of Advantage/Disadvantage for the City of Whittlesea shows that the southern sector of the municipality, especially Thomastown and Lalor, has high levels of disadvantage (many unskilled workers, higher unemployment

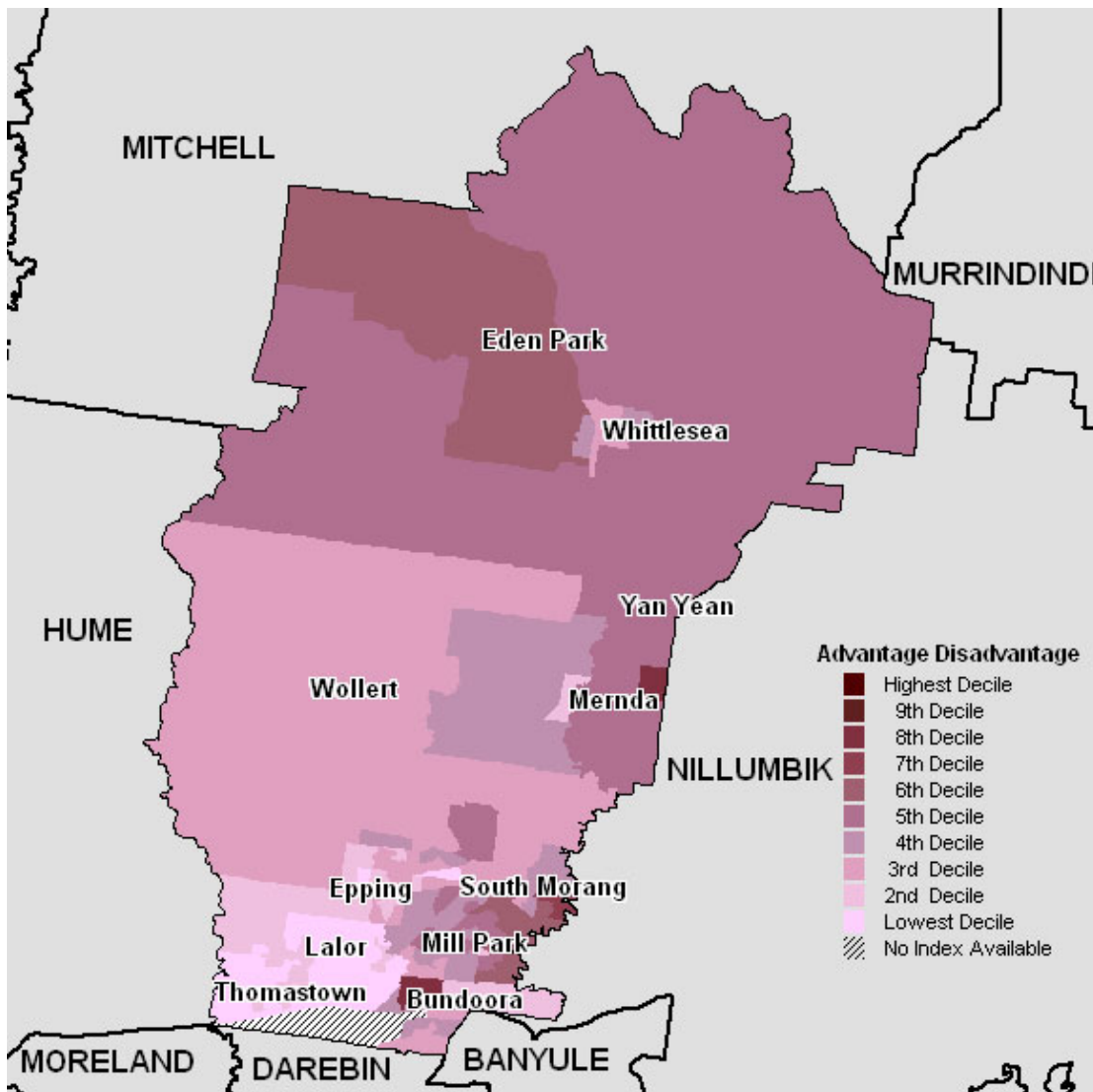


Figure 4: SEIFA Index of Advantage/Disadvantage

and households with low incomes compared to the MSD) which are not offset by indicators of advantage.

Thomastown is a residential and industrial area. In the south of Thomastown there are numerous factories, an electricity terminal station and the Metropolitan Ring Road. In the west there is a north-south reservation for the Hume Freeway. Major features of the area include seven primary schools, Thomastown Secondary College and Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre. Thomastown is connected to greater Melbourne by the train line, but has relatively poor public transport within the area.

Based on the demographic data presented above, a picture emerges of Thomastown as an established urbanised area with a population that is very multicultural, ageing, has high levels of disadvantage, and is declining slightly in numbers. These trends are expected to continue and become more pronounced.

This demographic profile implies that many Thomastown residents are unlikely to participate in public consultations on local government decision making if traditional means of recruitment and communication are used.

This is because CALD communities are less likely to respond to consultations advertised in the local media or through flyers, but are more likely to become involved if they are approached through community leaders and established networks. Using community leaders and ethnic community organisations also minimises the language barrier that can be experienced if publicity is available only in English. Furthermore, the elderly and people facing disadvantage may

need assistance in getting to places of consultation (e.g. community transport) and may feel more comfortable being consulted in surrounds that are familiar to them.

Active recruitment through existing networks and community groups, the provision of information in community languages and at places where the community congregates, and the use of interpreters are key to successfully engaging a diverse community such as Thomastown.

Active recruitment requires investment of time and the development of trust by cultivating continuing long term relationships between community groups and council. Otherwise invitations to community groups to participate in consultation may not be successful.

## Community consultation at the City of Whittlesea

The City of Whittlesea is in the process of developing its policies and procedures for community consultation. A draft policy, the *Community Consultation Checklist* (2005), is currently under review, and a series of mayoral forums linked to the development of the *Community Plan* (2006) are providing opportunities to engage with the community and test various forms of consultation. Community consultation at the City of Whittlesea must be viewed in the context of an organisation that is undergoing changes to its institutional processes.

Interviews with three city councillors highlighted that they had differing understandings and knowledge of the process as well as the role of community consultation in Council decision making. All stressed the importance of councillors being aware of community issues and preferences. All said that they have undertaken formal as well as informal consultation with the community. Mayoral forums, which are linked to the community plan, were seen as a key forum for formal consultation. The forums were introduced in 2005.

Councillors' views about the degree to which community opinions should affect the decision making process ranged from minimal impact to broad engagement. On one end of the spectrum, community consultation was seen mainly through the lens of statutory requirements. In this context, gathering information from the community was seen to be important, but the understanding was that at the end of the day it was the role of councillors to make the 'right' decision. Consultation

was viewed as a process that could potentially lead to problems: 'If you don't do everything the community asks, they don't see the consultation is valid.'

At the other end of the spectrum, the need to consult the community on a broad range of issues was emphasised. There was an awareness of the need to establish a consistent and uniform understanding of consultation throughout the organisation and operationalise this by linking with the administration.

Certain areas within Council (notably the service areas) have many established relationships with community groups and organisations which they use to get community feedback. The support and initiative of the mayor are a good prerequisite for broadening community consultation and engagement in Whittlesea.

At present, the City of Whittlesea does not have a formalised consultation framework. Commitment to community consultation varies considerably throughout the organisation – there is no consistent approach and certain sections of Council have their own consultation documents and guidelines. However, Council is taking steps towards a more formalised stance and has committed to 'develop and implement a Community Consultation Strategy by 30 June 2008' as a measure of its commitment to 'facilitate community participation in decision making and service planning' outlined as Strategy 1.1 of the *Community Plan 2006-2010* (City of Whittlesea 2006: 11).

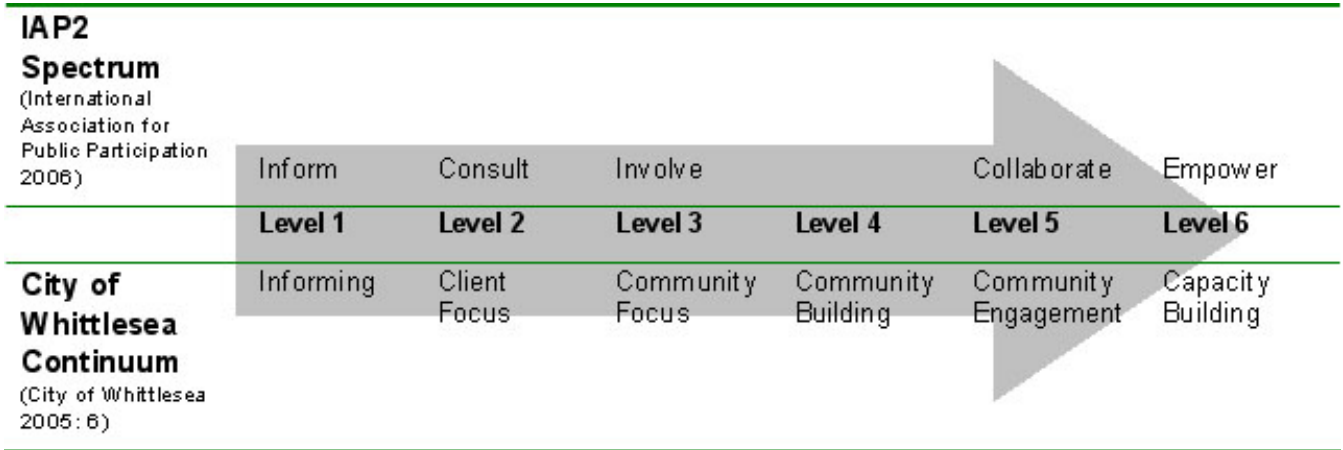


Figure 5: City of Whittlesea community consultation continuum

The most comprehensive document currently in use is the *Community Consultation Checklist* (City of Whittlesea 2005: 6) which doubles as policy for community consultation (email from Felicity Leahy, Social Planner and Coordinator, Sustainability Planning Unit, 21 March 2007). This is intended as a ‘How to ...’ guide for staff wishing to undertake community consultation at the City of Whittlesea. It includes *Keys to good consultation practice*, designed to assist in the planning of public participation and an attachment with models of community consultation. The *Community Consultation Checklist* refers its readers to contact City Marketing or the Research Unit (the authors of the document) for further support, or contact the Multicultural Officer and the Youth Services Officers if advice is required about consulting with diverse and younger audiences.

The *Keys to good consultation practice* and the availability of staff with a deeper knowledge of community consultation are a good start to establishing successful participatory practice at the City of

Whittlesea and make the *Community Consultation Checklist* a useful document. However, Attachment 1, ‘The Community Consultation Continuum’, includes confusing and potentially misleading information.

Attachment 1 presents a continuum approach to community consultation. Figure 1, *The CC Continuum*, presents a progression from low to high levels of community involvement (City of Whittlesea 2005: 5). It is notable that the terms used to define these six levels mirror the changing focus of Victorian state government policy towards communities.

Modelled very closely on the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, this chart essentially presents a continuum of increasing involvement in decision making along the following lines. Inform gives citizens no influence, with the steps consult, involve and collaborate leading up to citizen empowerment through devolved decision making. Overlaid are the policy terms from Figure 1 as illustrated in the summary graph below.

The difficulty with this model is that it assumes the different levels of community consultation are part of a linear progression, with steps that build on one another. The continuum view of public participation as a progression from information provision to citizen empowerment is based in communitarian perceptions of participatory democracy and its attendant benefits and outcomes. However, such a conceptualisation is not a useful model for pragmatic decision making in local government.

A look at key terminology and policy can shed light on this confusion. Changes in policy focus are due to an evolution in thinking about the relationship between local government and communities and the roles and responsibilities of local councils towards their constituents.

The notion of *client focus* is linked to the broad-ranging reforms of new public management that swept through the Victorian public sector in the 1990s. These applied private sector models emphasising efficiency, effectiveness and competition, and reshaped our public institutions. They targeted economic, management and governance aspects. Similar legislation in all states resulted in the amalgamation of small authorities, the adoption of market practices and the introduction of new management methods, in particular, strategic planning. In the process, citizens were recast as consumers (Brown & Keast 2003; Fountain 2001) and the community base for service delivery was eroded, leading to what is sometimes described as a crisis of community.

The current *community focus* can be seen to be a direct reaction to this (Adams & Hess 2001; Reddel & Woolcock 2004) and is part of a shift from

government to governance (Lane 2005). In Victoria, the introduction of the Best Value principles in 1999 and the passing of the Local Government (Democratic Reform) Act in 2003 emphasised increased accountability of local government to the community and the need for consultation with the community. Paired with state government policy shifts towards more decentralised forms of policy and program development (e.g. place management and neighbourhood renewal) in which local government plays a significant role, strategies for citizen participation are now firmly on the agenda.

Community consultation is seen as one of the central mechanisms to raise levels of public participation and to build capacity and social capital through the community building agenda. It is summed up by the idea of community engagement. Public participation can take many forms. In Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (2006) offers this somewhat nebulous definition:

*[engagement is] a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad range of interactions between people. It can include a variety of approaches, such as one-way communication or information delivery, consultation, involvement and collaboration in decision making, and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.*

The Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA)<sup>3</sup> adds to this an

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<sup>3</sup> The VLGA provides resources on governance, community engagement and consultation that are used frequently by Victorian councils,

emphasis on democratic legitimacy (democratic governance) but is not much clearer on the meanings of engagement or participation:

**Democratic governance** exists when a government governs for and on behalf of its community. Good democratic governance occurs when governments govern as a result of being elected by an informed and engaged electorate. Citizens exercise their rights and responsibilities by being informed and engaged.

**Engagement** is achieved when the community is and feels part of the overall governance of that community. It is informed, connected and feels it has a role to play.

**Participation** means that the community is involved in governance activities.

**Consultation** [is] the process of informed communication between the council and the community on an issue prior to the council making a decision or determining a direction on that issue.

What can be gleaned from these definitions is that participation is a broad category that encompasses various ways of involving the community in governance, while consultation is one form that such participation can take. Engagement is an outcome which occurs when there is good ongoing information flow, consultation and participation between council and community.

Consultation is just one element in the range of interactions that councils have with their constituencies. For the

purposes of the Hard to Reach project it is defined as 'a two-way exchange of information prior to a decision being made' (Brackertz et al. 2005). However, is a value-laden and complex concept that crosses definitional boundaries and is frequently used to denote participatory practice more generally.

A further dimension is provided by the state government's community strengthening agenda, which is about involving individuals and institutions in new forms of communication and connectedness. The underlying idea is that communities can be strengthened through better relationships with government and that better governance will result from stronger relationships with community (Considine 2004).

In policy terms engagement is supported by the state government's *A Fairer Victoria: Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage* (2005) social policy statement, at the heart of which lies the community building Initiative. It aims to bring residents together with government and community agencies to plan for and address local needs, build local leadership and foster community networks. This is backed by the *Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond* (2005) framework, which commits to a vibrant democracy and more accountable government by giving more Victorians from all backgrounds the opportunity to have a say on issues that matter to them.

Capacity building is a *process* that provides organisations and citizens with the skills and structures required for successful public participation rather than a level of community consultation. The capacity of the organisation to engage its constituents and the capacity of the

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<<http://www.vlgaconsultation.org.au/definitions.shtml>>.

citizens to interact with council and take action on issues that affect their community underpins the way local governments and citizens interact. There is 'an emerging role for local government to support and facilitate citizen participation in local governance through capacity building processes' (Cuthill & Fien 2005: 64). For council, prerequisites for this process include:

- i) the collection and provision of relevant empirical data describing the local community*
- ii) establishing equitable, accountable and transparent participatory policy and processes, and*
- iii) the development of a supportive organisational culture.* (Cuthill & Fien 2005: 64)

For the community, capacity building requirements include:

- i) enhanced citizen ability,*
- ii) enhanced community group ability, and*
- iii) the re/establishing of a cooperative community culture.* (Cuthill & Fien 2005: 64)

From these definitions it is clear that the steps presented in 'The Community Consultation Continuum' need not be seen as a linear progression, nor do they build on one another. Rather they can coexist as options, tools and approaches, depending on the purpose being pursued. Community building, engagement and capacity building are varying expressions of a focus on communities.

However, the capacity of the community and the council to engage with each

other and work together does affect how successful public participation will be.

An internal document titled *Summary of Community Consultation* (City of Whittlesea 2004) highlights the need to build relationships with communities and to build skills. However, it also states:

*There is no compulsion to constantly move communities to higher levels of CC, nor is there any requirement that after several years a movement to higher CC is necessary. In the absence of statutory regulation, Council can select to undertake whichever level of CC best suits both its residents, its resources, and the area of consultation.* (City of Whittlesea 2004: 1)

*These comments reflect a degree of reservation about the need for and benefits of community consultation. This sentiment was also echoed during a focus group held with Council staff (focus group transcripts, Whittlesea focus group, 27 July 2005) where some participants felt that certain areas of Council were not necessarily in favour of broad consultation.*

This is also reflected in another comment made during the focus group that

*the emphasis on consultation is now driven by state and federal government. So we often consult not because we think it's a good thing, but because we are made to do it.*

These attitudes and the documents discussed above indicate that Whittlesea is going through a series of institutional processes that are reshaping the way consultation is done and thought about at Council.

The benefits of these processes could be extended and broadened across the

organisation by encouraging internal discussion of the issues, organising joint planning days with multiple departments, and provision of training and resources for community consultation to all staff and councillors.

## The consultation process

The consultation on community preferences for the proposed redevelopment of TRAC was chosen as an example of a consultation about an important community facility in an area with a high proportion of residents from disadvantaged or CALD backgrounds. How far the consultation succeeded in attracting a representative section of current and potential future centre users was of particular interest in documenting the consultation.

The consultation on the TRAC Strategy took place as part of a study into the feasibility of redeveloping the facility to better meet community needs and attract a greater number of users. This is particularly important as the leisure opportunities provided by TRAC can significantly contribute to the health and wellbeing of a demographic (CALD, elderly and disadvantaged) that are traditionally under-represented in recreational sporting activities (Stratton et al. 2005).

These issues arose because of the age and condition of TRAC and its limited ability to meet community needs. The changing demographics of the Thomastown community and the need for a coordinated and informed approach to redeveloping TRAC also supported the need for public consultation about any proposed development of the centre (Prior & Cheney et al. 2006: 5). The consultation was intended to ascertain community and stakeholder perceptions, attitudes, needs, issues and aspirations (Prior & Cheney et al. 2006: 6) before going to tender for the provision of detailed architectural and design services for the redevelopment of indoor aquatic

facilities and external improvement to buildings and car park.

The consultation on the TRAC Strategy is an example of a consultation about a service that is for the whole community and is used primarily by local residents.

The demographic characteristics of Thomastown mean that many of its residents are seen to be hard to reach for the purposes of community consultation and are also less likely to participate in recreational sporting activities.

Consequently there is a degree of overlap between persons who can be difficult to involve in consultation and those who are under-represented in recreation activities such as those offered by TRAC. This makes an investigation of how to involve 'hard to reach' groups all the more relevant.

As part of the research methodology documenting the consultation process, the researcher observed many of the consultation workshops and interviewed Council staff and consultants.

### Profile of the facility

TRAC provides wet and dry recreational spaces. Originally conceived as an outdoor pool complex, it opened in 1979. Since then it has undergone a series of extensions and alterations and now includes three heated indoor pools (25m, learner/ toddler, hydrotherapy) as well as spa, sauna and steam rooms. Outdoors there are a further three non-heated pools (50m, 25m and wading). Dry recreational areas are a gymnasium/ health and fitness suite; a multipurpose/aerobics room; a two court multipurpose stadium; consulting

suites/massage room; male and female wet and dry change rooms; and a kiosk (Prior & Cheney et al. 2006: 8).

A profile of TRAC's users demonstrates its importance as a place of recreation for the local community, with most users coming from surrounding areas. Persons from Thomastown and Lalor, make up 68% of centre visitors, with another 20% coming from nearby Bundoora, Reservoir, Epping and Mill Park (Prior & Cheney et al. 2006: 26).

The facility, which is co-located with the Thomastown library and Community Centre in Main Street, is owned by the City of Whittlesea and was operated through a management agreement

As part of an estimated \$17 million upgrade to the facility, Council has allocated \$4 million in its 2007-08 proposed budget towards the redevelopment of TRAC, which will include the planning and initial development of a modern, multi-purpose health, fitness, recreation and aquatic centre (Mayor Kris Pavlidis, media release, 30 May 2007, <[http://whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/2124\\_Budget\\_0708\\_TRAC.pdf](http://whittlesea.vic.gov.au/files/2124_Budget_0708_TRAC.pdf)>). Construction is set to begin in March 2008.

## Community discussion groups

To get community feedback about TRAC, Council and consultants opted for a traditional consultation format, which comprised six discussion groups. Two of these were open to the general public. Another four were aimed at specific audiences using or intending to use TRAC (see Table 1).

Community members and groups were invited to prepare a submission outlining issues of concern to them. The consultants also conducted telephone and face to face interviews with community groups and key stakeholders.

The discussion groups and calls for submissions were advertised on Council's website and in the local paper 2-3 weeks in advance of sessions taking place. Council also contacted schools and leisure services staff. Flyers were posted on a notice board at TRAC and at

nearby Council and community centres. Copies were made available to youth, aged care and health and wellbeing service providers (Appendix 1). A covering letter (Appendix 2) and a copy of the flyer were also sent to schools. The advertising leaflet included phone numbers in community languages for the multilingual telephone line (see Appendix 1).

A two week postcode survey, conducted as part of the consultants' overall evaluation of the TRAC facility had shown that the vast majority of users come from Thomastown and Lalor. Consequently the discussion groups were held in Community Room 1&2 at the Thomastown library, which is directly adjacent to TRAC.

The discussion groups were facilitated by the consultants, who at each session gave a brief introduction summarising the purpose of the consultation and relevant

Discussion Group	Target Audience	Time and Date	Attendance
Community discussion group 1	Open to all members of the public	Monday 3 July 2006 4.00-5.30 pm	2
Community discussion group 2	Open to all members of the public	Thursday 6 July 2006 7.00-8.30 pm	0
Schools	All primary and secondary schools in the City of Whittlesea	Monday 3 July 2.00-3.30 pm	0
Sporting clubs	Sporting clubs and associations who currently use aquatic facilities or might be interested in using aquatic facilities for training or recreational purposes	Monday 3 July 2006 6.30-8.00 pm	22
Youth service providers		Thursday 6 July 2006 4.00-5.30 pm	1
Older adults and aged care and health and wellbeing service providers	Specialist older adults and aged care providers; health service providers including physiotherapists, doctors, sports medicine, disability service providers; children and family health specialists	Thursday 6 July 2006 2.00-3.30 pm	13

**Table 3: Discussion groups held for TRAC consultation**

issues before inviting community feedback. Council staff from Leisure Services were present as observers.

As can be seen from Table 1, turn-out at the discussion groups was variable. It is notable that no members of the 'general community' attended any of the sessions. Community Group 2 attracted no participants and only two persons attended Community Group 1: the coordinator of the women's swimming group, who had previously been employed by Council, and the coordinator of the Special Olympics group who use the centre on a fortnightly basis. Both made valuable contributions about the use and management of the facility. However, they represented special interest groups and cannot be seen to be representative of the 'general public'.

The discussion group for sporting clubs was well attended with 22 participants, but it should be noted that all but two were members of the Thomastown Swimming Club who train regularly at TRAC. Therefore, rather than representing a diversity of users, participants lent the weight of numbers to their viewpoints rather than expressing a range of opinions.

The consultation with older adults and aged care and health and wellbeing service providers was well attended by a diverse group of representatives – the only session to do so. Discussions were lively and varied, with many suggestions about how to improve management, communication and coordination with centre management and people and agencies providing services using TRAC.

Only one person attended the group for youth service providers and notably no representatives from schools attended

the consultation. This is somewhat of a concern as TRAC is close to a number of schools. Reasons may have to do with the timing of the announcement of consultations taking place and the date of the actual consultation occurring. Letters of invitation to schools were sent out on 13 June 2006 which was the first day of the school holidays, and the discussion groups were held on 3 July which was the first day of the new term. This unfortunate timing meant that key stakeholders were not given adequate notice of the meetings. To compensate for this, the consultants contacted a number of Thomastown schools to provide feedback about TRAC over the phone or in face to face interviews.

As part of the case study research, discussion group participants were asked to complete an evaluation form at the conclusion of each session (Appendix 3). Among other things, participants were asked how they had heard about the consultation. Members of the Thomastown Swimming Club overwhelmingly indicated that they had been informed by their coach that the meetings were taking place. He had spotted the advertising leaflet on TRAC's noticeboard by coincidence the week prior to the consultation. Others, mainly Council employees, had responded to the invitation sent out through the Leisure Services email list. A few participants had seen the advertisement in the local paper, while others again had heard by word of mouth or had been directly recruited by phone by other community members or Council services staff. Most participants commented on the short notice given of the meetings and the 'accidental' nature of their discovery that the consultation was taking place.

On a positive note, given there were no specific efforts to include hard to reach groups, the consultation attracted a very diverse range of representatives and advocates from groups that are frequently seen to be hard to reach. This indicates the significance of the TRAC facility for these groups as well as an eagerness of community representatives to be provided with opportunities to participate in planning and decision making about Council facilities that are of significance to them. Attendees included:

- The coordinator of the women's swimming group
- The coordinator of the Special Olympics Group
- Representatives of the Whittlesea and Thomastown Turkish women's' associations
- A representative from Vision Australia who made many excellent suggestions about design characteristics that would make the facility more accessible to visually impaired people, as well as suggesting how designers could work with Vision Australia to improve design of the facility
- A number of service providers and community workers who act as liaison points with CALD communities, the elderly, disabled persons, persons undergoing physical rehabilitation etc.

### **Evaluation of the TRAC strategy consultation**

Thomastown's demographic profile implies that many of its residents are unlikely to participate in public consultations if traditional means of recruitment and communication are used.

Alternative methods and active outreach are key to engaging these population segments. Recruitment can be done through existing community organisations, community leaders and established links with the community. Information that is provided in community languages and at places where the community congregates is also key to recruitment, and interpreters can further assist to overcome language barriers. Especially in an area of high disadvantage, where many residents are elderly, the provision of community transport to the consultation venue can also assist to boost attendance.

Put into context, the patchy attendance at consultation meetings and comments made by participants, consultants and Council staff point to some major issues with the consultation process.

Consultants found it difficult to get a proposed programme of consultation approved by Council. A suggested strategy was progressively cut back until it was the minimal consultation outlined above. Attempts by Council to involve CALD community members by providing information in community languages or using established community networks were not successful.

Ambivalence about the role and need for community consultation from some councillors and Council staff meant that the culture of consultation is not yet well established at Whittlesea. There is a degree of hesitation about conducting community consultation and only a relatively small number of community consultations take place. This means that the capacity of Council staff and the community to engage in consultation activity is not fully developed and that some staff and community members are

sceptical about the outcomes. This is demonstrated, for example, by the fact that the discussion group aimed at youth service providers, most of whom work for or with Council, attracted only one attendee. Many participants in the discussion groups commented that while they felt positively about the fact that Council was consulting, they were very sceptical about the impact the consultation would have.

The consultants' report commented on this issue:

*Council has not consulted with the community about TRAC for some time and it is clear that the community needs to be encouraged and educated about participating in community consultation. It would be valuable for Council to conduct similar, more detailed and more regular consultations with its various communities as these provide invaluable information on both the success of initiatives undertaken and the most appropriate and effective actions to pursue in the future. (Prior & Cheney et al. 2006: 25)*

The attendance of so many advocates and representatives for hard to reach groups highlights the significance of TRAC as a place of recreation, rehabilitation and wellbeing for community members who are often under-represented in physical leisure activities and who have limited financial means.

Participants made many good suggestions about redevelopment possibilities for TRAC. However, most were sceptical about the possibility of a major redevelopment of the facility and viewed this more as a long-term wish list. In light of this, it is perhaps of concern

that many of the matters raised were not about the physical provision of the building (although this was an acknowledged issue), but had to do with the management of the facility.

Broadly, concerns related to the cost of using the facility, suitability of the facility and programs for a broad range of community members, and the maintenance of equipment.

## Recommendations

The consultation on the TRAC strategy must be seen in the context of a Council that is still in the early stages of developing its participatory processes.

participation through an ongoing process of engagement.

It is recommended that:

- Council fully develop and refine its policy for public participation. This should include processes that are inclusive of a representative range of community members.
- Council continue to promote debate about the processes and use of public participation in Council planning and decision making.
- Council continue to refine its institutional processes that facilitate education about public participation; these could include planning days, organisation-wide forums and training.
- Council develop a range of resources for consulting with the Whittlesea community that go beyond traditional methods and that are suited to engaging with its diverse, multi-ethnic and rapidly growing community.
- A strategy for linking community consultation to decision making processes by Council officers and councillors be put in place.
- The capacity of Council staff and councillors to conduct community consultation be developed through training.
- The capacity of the community to participate be developed by educating about the role of public participation in Council decision making and providing opportunities for

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Advertising flyer**



## Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre Strategy

The City of Whittlesea is committed to providing quality leisure facilities to the local community. Making sure the facilities fit the needs and aspirations of residents is an important aspect of this. To plan the most appropriate facilities, we need your input.

Council wants to find out:

- What aquatic leisure facilities and services are important to the local community.
- What aquatic leisure facilities are needed at the Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre.

Council will also be considering how the community is likely to change over time and what needs to be undertaken at Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre to meet both the current and future aquatic leisure needs.

### There are two ways you can get involved:

1. Attend a **community discussion group** to have input and discuss ideas for the possible future development of Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre, and / or,
2. Prepare a **submission** outlining issues of interest and concern to you about the Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre.

Council values your input even if you do not use leisure centres. Any new or revitalised aquatic leisure facilities Council pursues may include aquatics, social, non-aquatic recreation or sporting opportunities which may be appropriate to your needs and interests in the future.

Submissions can be brought to one of the community discussion groups or dropped off at:

Civic Centre  
Ferres Boulevard  
South Morang

OR

Returned by post to:  
Vanessa Arthur  
Leisure Planner  
City of Whittlesea  
Locked Bag 1  
BUNDOORA, MDC 3083

by Friday 7 July 2006 at the latest.

Community discussion groups will be held as follows:

**Community Discussion Group 1**  
 Monday 3 July 2006 4pm - 5.30pm

**Community Discussion Group 2**  
 Thursday 6 July 2006 7pm – 8.30pm

***Discussion groups are open to all members of the community.***

Community discussion groups for special interest groups/ and organisations focused forums will be held as follows:

<p><b>Schools</b></p> <p>Monday 3 July 2006 2pm - 3.30pm</p> <p><b><i>All primary and secondary schools in the City of Whittlesea.</i></b></p>	<p><b>Sporting Clubs</b></p> <p>Monday 3 July 2006 6.30pm - 8pm</p> <p><b><i>Sporting clubs and associations who currently use aquatic facilities or might be interested in using aquatic facilities for training or recreational purposes.</i></b></p>
<p><b>Youth Service Providers</b></p> <p>Thursday 6 July 2006 4pm - 5.30pm</p>	<p><b><i>Older Adults and Aged Care and Health and Wellbeing Service Providers</i></b></p> <p>Thursday 6 July 2006 2pm - 3.30pm</p> <p><b><i>Specialist older adults and ages care providers and health service providers including physiotherapists, doctors, sports medicine, disability service providers, children and family health specialists.</i></b></p>

**All community discussion groups will be held at:**

Thomastown Library  
 Community Room 1 & 2  
 52 Main Street, Thomastown  
 Melways ref: 8 G7

Council encourages your participation, if you have any questions please contact Vanessa Arthur, Council's Leisure Planner on 9217 2302, TTY 9217 2420.

<b>Multilingual Telephone Line</b>			
خدمة الهاتف	9679 9871	電話服務	9679 9876
Telefonska služba	9679 9872	Telefon servisi	9679 9877
Τηλεφωνική Υπηρεσία	9679 9873	Dịch vụ Thông dịch	9679 9878
Servizio telefonico	9679 9874	电话服务	9679 9857
Телефонска служба	9679 9875	Telephone services in other languages	9679 9879

## **Appendix 2**

### **Covering letter**

Enquiries: Vanessa Arthur

File Reference: 157451

13 June 2006

Dear

### **Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre Strategy**

The City of Whittlesea is committed to providing quality leisure facilities to the local community. Making sure the facilities fit the needs and aspirations of residents is an important aspect of this. To plan the most appropriate facilities, we need your input.

Council has initiated a strategy into future aquatic and leisure service provision for the Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre. Your **school/organisation is invited** to take part into the Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre strategy to determine how it can best meet the community's aquatic leisure needs.

Council wants to find out:

- What aquatic and leisure facilities and services are important to you and your community.
- What aquatic and leisure facilities are needed at the Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre.

Council will also be considering other information such as trends in aquatics and leisure provision, programs and services and how the community is likely to change over time and what needs to be done at Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre to meet both the current and future aquatic leisure needs.

**There are two ways your (school)/( organisation) can get involved.** You can either

1. Send a representative of your **school/organisation** to a **community discussion group** to have input and discuss ideas for the possible future development of Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre and / or,
2. Prepare a **submission** outlining issues of interest and concern to your **school/organisation** about aquatic leisure facilities and services in the City of Whittlesea.

If you or members of your staff, colleagues, associated groups or members in the wider community wish to provide personal input please prepare a submission or attend one of the community discussion groups.

Council values your **school/organisation's** input, even if it does not currently use leisure centres. Any new or revitalised aquatic leisure facilities developed by Council may include aquatics, social, non-aquatic recreation or sporting opportunities which may meet your **school/organisations** needs and interests in the future.

A timetable outlining the community discussion groups which will be held in early July 2006 is attached. You are invited to attend the discussion group for **(name of forum)** on **(date)** at **(time)** or another of the groups if you are unable to make this date and time.

**RSVP by:**

Friday 30 June 2006

Phone: Vanessa Arthur on **9217 2302**

E-mail: [vanessa.arthur@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:vanessa.arthur@whittlesea.vic.gov.au)

Submissions can be brought to one of the community discussion groups or dropped off at:

Civic Centre  
Ferres Boulevard  
South Morang

Or returned by post to:

Vanessa Arthur  
Leisure Project Officer  
City of Whittlesea  
Locked Bag 1  
BUNDOORA, MDC 3083

by Friday 7 July 2006 at the latest.

Council encourages your participation, if you have any questions about the information enclosed with this letter, please contact Vanessa Arthur, Council's Leisure Planner on 9217 2302.

Yours sincerely

**Paul Reading**  
**Manager Leisure Services and Planning**

<b>Multilingual Telephone Line</b>			
خدمة الهاتف	9679 9871	電話服務	9679 9876
Telefonska služba	9679 9872	Telefon servisi	9679 9877
Τηλεφωνική Υπηρεσία	9679 9873	Dịch vụ Thông dịch	9679 9878
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Телефонска служба	9679 9875	Telephone services in other languages	9679 9879

## **Appendix 3**

### **Participant evaluation**

# Thomastown Recreation and Aquatic Centre Strategy

## Participant Evaluation of the Consultation Process

The City of Whittlesea invites your feedback on the meeting you attended today. This is part of an independent evaluation of the consultation process by Swinburne University and your responses will be treated strictly confidential.

*Below are some statements about the consultation process.*

*Please **circle** your preferred response, from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Dis- agree	Strongly disagree
A) I am clear about the purpose of the meeting.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
B) I am clear about my role in the consultation process.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
C) Information at the meeting was presented in a clear and understandable way.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
D) At the meeting there was enough time for everyone to have their say today.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
E) At the meeting I was given enough opportunity to make a contribution and voice my concerns today.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
F) I thought the meeting was well run.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
G) I think everyone affected by the issue consulted upon has a fair opportunity to participate in the consultation.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
H) The meeting was run in an unbiased way.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
I) The information / suggestions that came out of the meeting reflected the discussion.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
J) I think Council will listen to community views.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
K) The location of the meeting was convenient for me (eg public transport available, disability access, safety, parking etc).	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....
L) The timing of the meeting made it easy for me to attend.	..... 1 .....	2 .....	3 .....	4 .....	5 ....

**M) How did you hear about the meeting?**

.....  
.....

**N) I know of others who would have liked to attend the meeting but were not able to for the following reasons ...**

.....  
.....

**O) Is there anything else you would like to say about today's meeting?**

.....  
.....  
.....

**Please tell us a little bit about yourself.**

**P) I am**                       male                       female

**Q) My age group is:**

- under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- over 65

**R) I mainly work ...**

(you can choose more than one response)

- Full time
- Part time / casual
- Unemployed
- Retired
- Student
- Full time parent / carer
- Other

**S) Do you speak a language other than English at home?    Yes    No**

**If yes, please specify the MAIN language you speak at home.**

.....

**T) What is your suburb / postcode? .....**

**Thank you for completing this evaluation form.**

FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW

As part of the project evaluation, researchers from Swinburne may want to contact you to ask some follow up questions, either in person or on the phone. If you are willing to answer some follow up questions, please provide your contact details below.

All responses will be confidential.

Name:	
Address:	
Email:	
Phone:	