Governance Rules Review 2025 Community Engagement Report

This report provides information on the community consultation for the Governance Rules Review 2025 project and reports on the engagement outcomes. The consultation opened on Tuesday 28 January and closed at 9am on Monday 24 February 2025

Overview

Project background

At the Council Meeting on 26 November 2024, a motion was put forward looking to "commence community engagement to amend the Governance Rules to repeal the requirement for residents to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council meetings in Rule 53." This motion was passed during the Meeting.

A report was presented to the Council Meeting on Tuesday 17 December for Council to endorse the revised version of the Governance Rules for engagement and the engagement approach to understand community sentiment on the proposed change to Public Question Time mentioned above, and the proposed change of requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised.

The final document will be presented to Council for adoption in 2025 alongside the results of this stage of engagement for a Council decision.

Objectives of this engagement

1. To inform the community of the purpose of the Governance Rules and the changes proposed within the revised Governance Rules.
2. To understand community agreement on the proposed change to Public Question Time in line with Notice of Motion 19 of 2024.
3. To understand community agreement on the proposed change of requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised.
4. To ensure the promotion of this consultation provides the opportunity for our broad community to participate.

Level of community influence

1. Community feedback informed Council's understanding of the community's level of agreement to repeal the requirement for residents to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council Meetings in Rule 53.
2. Community feedback informed Council's understanding of the community's level of agreement of requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised.

Engagement methods:

- Online survey tool hosted through Your Say Yarra engagement platform

Engagement questions:

- Do you agree with the following proposed changes to the Governance Rules? Please indicate your level of agreement from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'.
    - Repealing the requirement for community members to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council Meetings
    - Requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised (for example, where a complete response may not be able to be provided at the Council Meeting)
- Do you have any additional feedback on the proposed changes?
- (If free text response is answered) – Which of the proposed changes do your comments above refer to?
    - Repealing the requirement for community members to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council Meetings
    - Requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised (for example, where a complete response may not be able to be provided at the Council Meeting)

Engagement reach

Engagement promotion:
Social media channels reaching over 4,200 people.
Council email newsletters including Yarra Life and Your Say Yarra email newsletter. This reached more than 8,406 subscribers.
News story on Yarra City Council's website and promotion on Council's homepage.

Your Say Yarra project page:

The success of the Your Say Yarra page is tracked against the following metrics:

- **Views** - The number of times the page was seen.
- **Visitors** – The number of unique visitors that saw the page.
- **Responses** – The number of feedback responses that were submitted.

Views	Visitors	Responses
335	246	94

Duplication

- **2 survey form responses** were identified as duplicates and have been merged.
    - Therefore, there were **94 unique responses** to the survey tool

Long form responses

- **1 response** was received via email through generic customer service channels and did not contain demographic data or a clear response to question 1. Therefore, the data has been omitted from the demographic table below and Figure 1 below.
    - The content of the email was themed and logged alongside the other long form text responses.

Engagement results

Who did we hear from?

Demographic data was collected via the 94 online copies of the engagement tool.

What's your connection to Yarra? *(Respondents could select multiple options here)*	Numbers	Percentage
I live in Yarra	91	96.81%
I work in Yarra	28	29.79%
I visit Yarra	7	7.45%
I study in Yarra	1	1.06%
I own a property or mortgage in Yarra	51	54.26%
I rent in Yarra	5	5.32%
I own a business in Yarra	12	12.77%
What gender do you identify as?	**Numbers**	**Percentage**
Man	42	44.68%
Woman	44	46.81%
Self-described	0	0.00%
I prefer not to say	8	8.51%
What is your age range?	**Numbers**	**Percentage**
Under 11	0	0.00%
12 to 17	0	0.00%
18 to 24	0	0.00%
25 to 34	3	3.19%
35 to 49	21	22.34%
50 to 59	16	17.02%

60 to 69	29	30.85%
70 to 84	19	20.21%
85 and older	0	0.00%
I prefer not to say	6	6.38%
What suburb do you live in	**Numbers**	**Percentage**
Abbotsford	7	7.45%
Alphington	4	4.26%
Burnley	0	0.00%
Carlton North	4	4.26%
Clifton Hill	9	9.57%
Collingwood	9	9.57%
Cremorne	1	1.06%
Fairfield	2	2.13%
Fitzroy	9	9.57%
Fitzroy North	13	13.83%
Princes Hill	0	0.00%
Richmond	34	36.17%
I live outside of Yarra	2	2.13%
Select all that apply. I am…. ***(Respondents could select multiple options here)***	**Numbers**	**Percentage**
Someone who speaks a language other than English at home.	12	12.77%
A person living with a disability.	5	5.32%
A member of the LGBTIQA+ community.	13	13.83%
Someone of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent.	0	0.00%

None of the above.	55	58.51%
I prefer not to say.	11	11.70%
Are you providing feedback on behalf of a community group?	**Numbers**	**Percentage**
Yes	0	0%
No	94	100%

What did we hear?

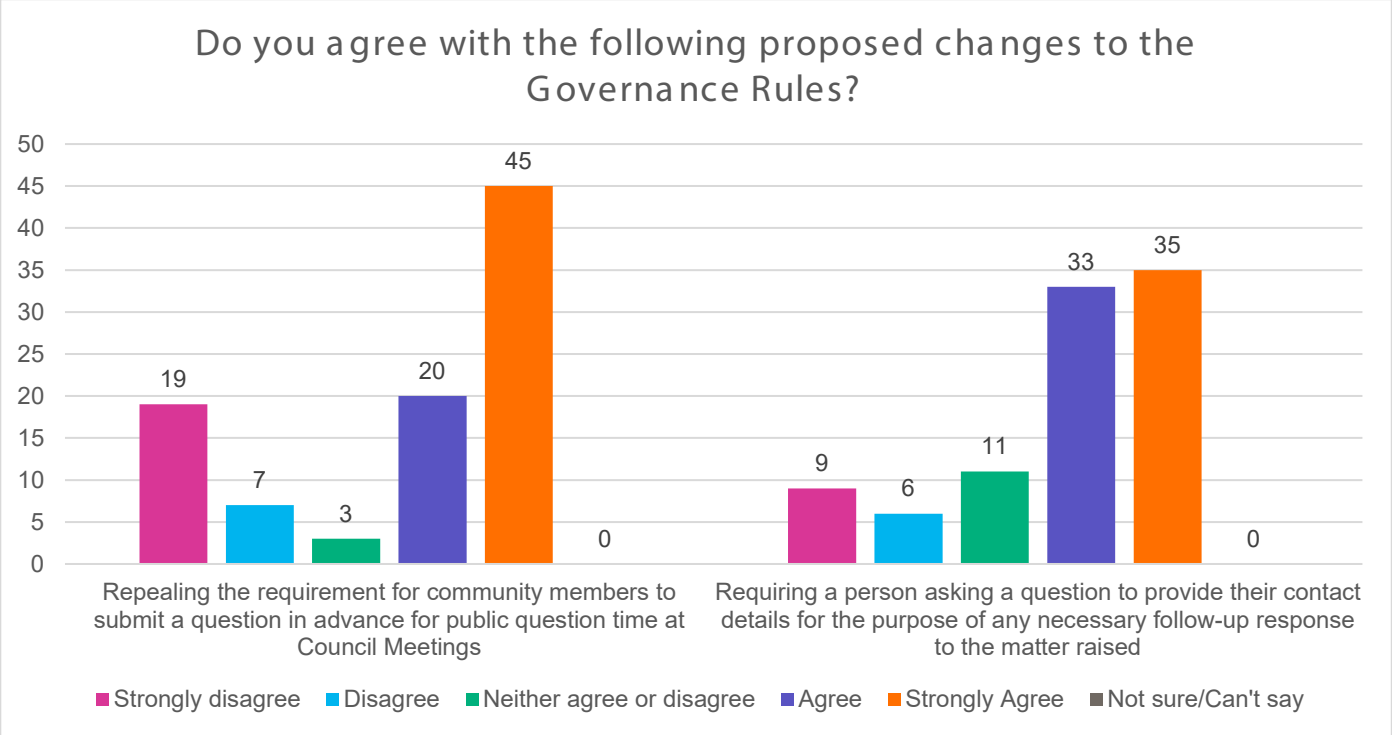


Figure 1 – Results from Question 1 of Governance Rules 2025 consultation (94 total responses).

Do you agree with the following proposed changes to the Governance Rules? 94 total responses.	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither agree or disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Not sure/Can't say**	**TOTAL**
Repealing the requirement for community members to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council Meetings **(Number)**	19	7	3	20	45	0	**94**

Repealing the requirement for community members to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council Meetings **(Percentage)**	20.21%	7.45%	3.19%	21.28%	47.87%	0.00%	**100.00%**
Requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised **(Number)**	9	6	11	33	35	0	**94**
Requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised **(Percentage)**	9.57%	6.38%	11.70%	35.11%	37.23%	0.00%	**100.00%**

Responses commenting on the proposed change:

"Repealing the requirement for community members to submit a question in advance for public question time at Council Meetings"

34 total comments. **Please note**: Responses could touch on multiple themes

Theme 1 - Desire for prepared responses (13 comments)

What did we hear	Our response
• "The 24 hour window provides the council the opportunity to formulate a response in advance - which is wanted - rather than relying on the excuse of taking the question on notice and getting back in writing." *(Disagree)* • "The only comment I'll make is that I believe if the 24-hour change is made there will be lots of I will get back to you via email and many questions will not be answered in the public forum" *(Neither agree or disagree)* • "The chance anyone is present who can address the matter(s) raised is severely diminished. Continual deference of the	Responses noted.

questions with the "have to get back to you on that", destroying community communications' transparency. This defeats the whole reason for questions on notice - to have someone ready to address the question that actually knows what they are talking about." *(Strongly Disagree)*	

Theme 2 - General support for the change (9 comments)

What did we hear	Our response
• "Support these as sensible changes" *(Strongly agree)* • "Pleased to see that this 24hr requirement is scheduled to be removed - quite how it was ever implemented is beyond me." *(Strongly agree)* • "I'm thrilled the council is seeking to reverse the outrageous change made to question time requiring people to submit questions in advance." *(Strongly agree)* • "These changes must occur. In the past questions have been asked, and pre-prepared answers given - which were not truthful, or misleading, or pure obfuscation." *(Strongly agree)*	Response noted.

Theme 3 - Support a combination of prepared and questions in the moment (6 comments)

What did we hear	Our response
• "Maybe consider having an option of submitting in advance for people that actually want a quick response and value efficiency, while also allowing questions not registered in advance?" *(Disagree)* • "There should also remain an option for questions to be lodged in writing, with these given priority. A time limit on question time is reasonable to prevent council meetings from running excessively late, but written questions should be prioritised to ensure they are heard and not overlooked due to time constraints." *(Strongly agree)* • "Suggest including an OPTIONAL category "Questions with Notice" to allow time for council officers time to prepare a response." *(Strongly agree)*	Should the proposed changes to the Governance Rules be amended, there will be no rules that would limit the ability for Council to provide an option for questions to be submitted in advance.

Theme 6 - Concern meeting will become longer/too long (5 comments)

What did we hear	Our response

• "If people don't send questions in advance I think the meetings will become longer than they already are as residents have last minute queries or respond to other questions with one of their own" *(Strongly disagree)* • "I would actually also like to see identical questions only being asked and answered once so that the meetings don't go on so long." *(Strongly disagree)* • "Council meeting can be difficult at times. Requiring 24 hours notice is importance to give everyone a chance to think about their question and have it dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. I've sat at Council meetings for over four hours and still not having my questions answered. I've also sat for hours waiting for question time to finish before the major business of Council is even attended to." *(Strongly disagree)*	Response noted.
Theme 4 – Desire to participate in the meeting online (4 comments)	
What did we hear	**Our response**
• "I think it is unfortunate that the person asking a question has to be physically present at the meeting and cannot participate in the meeting online. This was possible during Covid so why not now? As far as I am aware it is possible at other Councils." *(Strongly agree)* • "Allowing people to ask questions online should be a standard practice. We implemented it during COVID, so it should still be available now. This approach ensures that individuals who cannot attend in person, or for whom physical attendance is not feasible, can still participate and ask questions." *(Strongly agree)* • "More broadly, if the Governance Rules are to be altered, they should replace 'in person public questions' at council meetings with 'online public questions'. This process would be more equitable and inclusionary because any person could submit a question at any time, either by email or via an online form, indicating that it is a 'public' question. All questions and answers would be stored in a database, and would be searchable and viewable via the council website." *(Strongly disagree)*	The Governance Rules do not allow participation of community members by electronic means of communication.
Theme 5 – Amendment may disrupt Council Meetings or encourage poor behaviour (4 comments)	
What did we hear	**Our response**

• "Increase in adverse behaviour around questioning used for other motives, or "sensationalism" questions threatening Council meetings – particularly live attendance. Is the aim to go to virtual Council meetings by making question time volatile?" *(Strongly disagree)* • "Some members of the community are not considerate and very indulgent of Council time." *(Strongly disagree)* • "If the council cared about being more inclusive of those who want to ask questions then they would increase the ways questions could be asked eg via video or perhaps read out by a proxy etc etc – and ensure that questions continue to be provided ahead of time so staff have the time to get answers and also to reduce the poor intimidating behaviours of others turning up and hurling abuse." *(Strongly disagree)*	Response noted.

The following themes were also identified within responses to this change:

- Desire for the ability to ask follow up questions **(3 comments)**
- Unsure of the rationale behind this change **(3 comments)**
- Comment was unrelated to section 53 of the Governance Rules **(3 comments)**
- Desire for questions on notice to be documented and minuted **(2 comments)**
- Difficult to find a balance between bureaucracy and free speech **(2 comments)**
- Dissatisfaction with responses in the past **(2 comments)**
- Desire for a more comprehensive review of the Governance Rules overall **(1 comment)**
- Desire to have the speaker state their connection to Yarra when lodging a question **(1 comment)**
- Desire for all possible questions to be answered during the meeting **(1 comment)**
- Desire for councillors to have more power to challenge evasive or inadequate responses and request further clarification. **(1 comment)**
- Changes disempower community **(1 comment)**
- Will lead to minority groups dominating question time **(1 comment)**
- Proposed change conflict with other areas of the Governance Rules **(1 comment)**
- Introduce an option where Council Officers can read questions and responses on behalf of residents **(1 comment)**

Responses commenting on the proposed change:

"Requiring a person asking a question to provide their contact details for the purpose of any necessary follow-up response to the matter raised (for example, where a complete response may not be able to be provided at the Council Meeting)"

29 total responses. **Please note**: Responses could touch on multiple themes.

Theme 1 - General support for the change (8 comments)

What did we hear	Our response
• "These are common sense amendments, making for better governance. Access for members of the public to the processes of Council are important." *(Agree)*	Response noted.

• "I definitely agree with providing contact details to avoid possible distractors from wasting council time. Obviously it may be necessary to follow-up on some questions." *(Strongly agree)* • "Great, was really upset when the original changes were made. Glad to see it reversed." *(Strongly agree)*	

Theme 2 - Support for using contact details to verify resident/ratepayers (4 comments)

What did we hear	Our response
• "It's important that people can raise issues at meetings, however it's also important to preserve the integrity and ensure that Councillors are aware whether questions are being raised by residents vs other interested parties." *(Strongly agree)* • "Contact details makes sense to also ensure that the person making the question is a resident of Yarra or is not making vexatious disruptions" *(Strongly agree)* • "The contact details also ensures that people using council question time are ratepayers / live in the council area." (*Strongly disagree)*	Response noted.

Theme 3 - Request ability to provide contact details confidentially (4 comments)

What did we hear	Our response
• "I am generally supportive of the proposed changes; however, contact details should be provided confidentially." *(Strongly agree)* • "I only agree with people providing contact details if they do this confidentially. Nobody should state their contact details publicly in the meeting - this would go against council's commitment to keeping people safe from family and gendered violence. Council must help people be safe and only collect contact details in a safe way. This needs to be overt in the rules." *(Neither agree or disagree)* • "If contact details are to be provided in a public meeting: ○ There is a high chance your will be in beach of the law for PPI. The amendment is poorly worded on how the details are provided and recorded in a public space - and great for thieves if the person is in the meeting and supplies their address!!!!	All contact details provided will be managed and stored in accordance with Council's Information Privacy Policy and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014.

○ This will put fear into many who would want to ask a question robbing the community of an essential line of communications. Is that the intent?" *(Strongly disagree)*	

Theme 4 - Unrelated to section 53 of the Governance Rules (4 comments)	
What did we hear	**Our response**
• "I remain unconfident that these feedback consultations are anything more than a box ticking exercise to say the council has had feedback, but then going on to do whatever they want anyway. You work for us, and you should tailor your systems to suit US" *(Neither agree or disagree)* • "CoY staff are a disgrace and have a political agenda" *(Neither agree or disagree)* • "We've had too many situations where resident interest has been overshadowed by outside interests and that has to stop" *(Strongly agree)*	Response noted.

Theme 5 - Request making the requirement for contact details optional (4 comments)	
What did we hear	**Our response**
• "People should not have to register to speak, and I think it should be optional to provide contact information depending if that person wants follow up or not" *(Neither agree or disagree)* • A person asking a question should have the option to give their contact details for follow up but it should not be a requirement. *(Strongly disagree)* • "Not everyone feels comfortable sharing their contact details, or necessarily wants follow ups, and as such requiring these details to be shared could discourage participation. I would again suggest stating a preference for collecting contact details but making it optional." *(Strongly disagree)*	Contact details will only be sought should any necessary follow up is required.

The following themes were also identified within responses to this change:

- Changes disempower community **(2 comments)**
- Dissatisfaction with Council responses in the past **(2 comments)**
- Difficult to find a balance between bureaucracy and free speech **(1 comment)**
- Desire to participate in the meeting online **(1 comment)**
- Request to clarify the terms of when contact details need to be provided **(1 comment)**
- Request that we provide the contact details of necessary officers **(1 comment)**
- Change is unnecessary **(1 comment)**