SOUTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE COUNCIL

COMMUNICATIONS & ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2019 - 2024

February 2019

Greater Hamilton
ONE PLACE. MANY POSSIBILITIES

Southern Grampians
SHIRE COUNCIL

INTRODUCTION
PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

Southern Grampians Shire Council is committed to establishing and maintaining open communication channels with residents, ratepayers, local business and community groups, as well as staff and their families. We are committed to engaging with the community of Southern Grampians Shire and involving them in the preparation of strategies, plans and policies, the implementation of projects and Council activities.

We The Communications and Engagement Strategy has been prepared as part of Council's commitment to encourage open, transparent and active relationships between Council and the Community on a wide range of issues. Effective two-way communication and positive engagement strategies allow Council to make more informed decisions, plan for the future and have a clearer indication of what residents reasonably want and expect from them.

The strategy supports Council's Council Plan objectives **1.1 "An empowered and resilient community"** and **5.1 "Provide transparent and responsible governance"**.

The strategy is underpinned by community feedback which provided Council with an understanding of our community and insights into their desired relationship with Council.

The objectives of developing this strategy were to:

• Understand community satisfaction and expectations of Council in the areas of communication and community engagement;

• Analyse Council's current process in Engagement and Communications in order to ensure Council is effectively reaching the community;

• Identify new initiatives and key projects Council will develop over the next five years to ensure clear, consistent messaging; the timely, effective distribution of key information; and meaningful and targeted engagement with our community; and

• Supports Council in its commitment to communicate and engage in a way that encourages an open, transparent relationship between community and Council.

Council is moving community engagement from the 'practice' of a few staff to core business, identifying engagement as playing a vital role in planning and decision-making. This move to embed community engagement as part of our regular business practices will be cultivated through the application of this strategy at all levels of the organisation, embedding best practice through the development of engagement plans as a basis in our decision-making processes, using the outcomes of consultation to inform what we do.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY **COMMUNICATIONS**?

Communication is the process of facilitating information and knowledge exchange between an organisation and its stakeholders. It encompasses a variety of public relations functions including media management, marketing, internal communication and stakeholder consultation.

COMMUNICATION PROMOTES:

- Strong corporate culture;

- Coherent corporate identity;

- A genuine sense of corporate citizenship and staff satisfaction;

- Understanding of communication tools and technologies; and

- An appropriate and professional relationship with media.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY **ENGAGEMENT**?

The term 'community engagement' can mean different things to different organisations and community members. Here, the terms 'community' and 'community engagement' have been defined to provide clarity.

DEFINING COMMUNITY

The term 'community' is defined as individuals or organisations who may have an interest or potential interest in the outcome of a project and/or who may have some influence over the outcome of the project. The definition can be expanded to include those people who are impacted by a decision.

'Community' includes individual rate payers, community members and groups, government agencies, industry bodies, authorities and funders. Community can also be described in terms of a geographical area or by a shared interest or issue.

DEFINING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement is the activities that Council use to gather and share knowledge, and interact with relevant stakeholders and the community, in order to:

- Include community knowledge in the design and implementation of Southern Grampians Shire strategies, programs and initiatives;

- Seek feedback from the community on proposed services, strategies, programs and initiatives;

- Involve the community in the implementation and monitoring of identified programs and projects;

- Develop enduring partnerships with key stakeholders that enable the sharing of ideas, resources and responsibilities for the Council's strategies, programs and initiatives; and

- Better inform the community about Council's services, strategies, programs and initiatives.
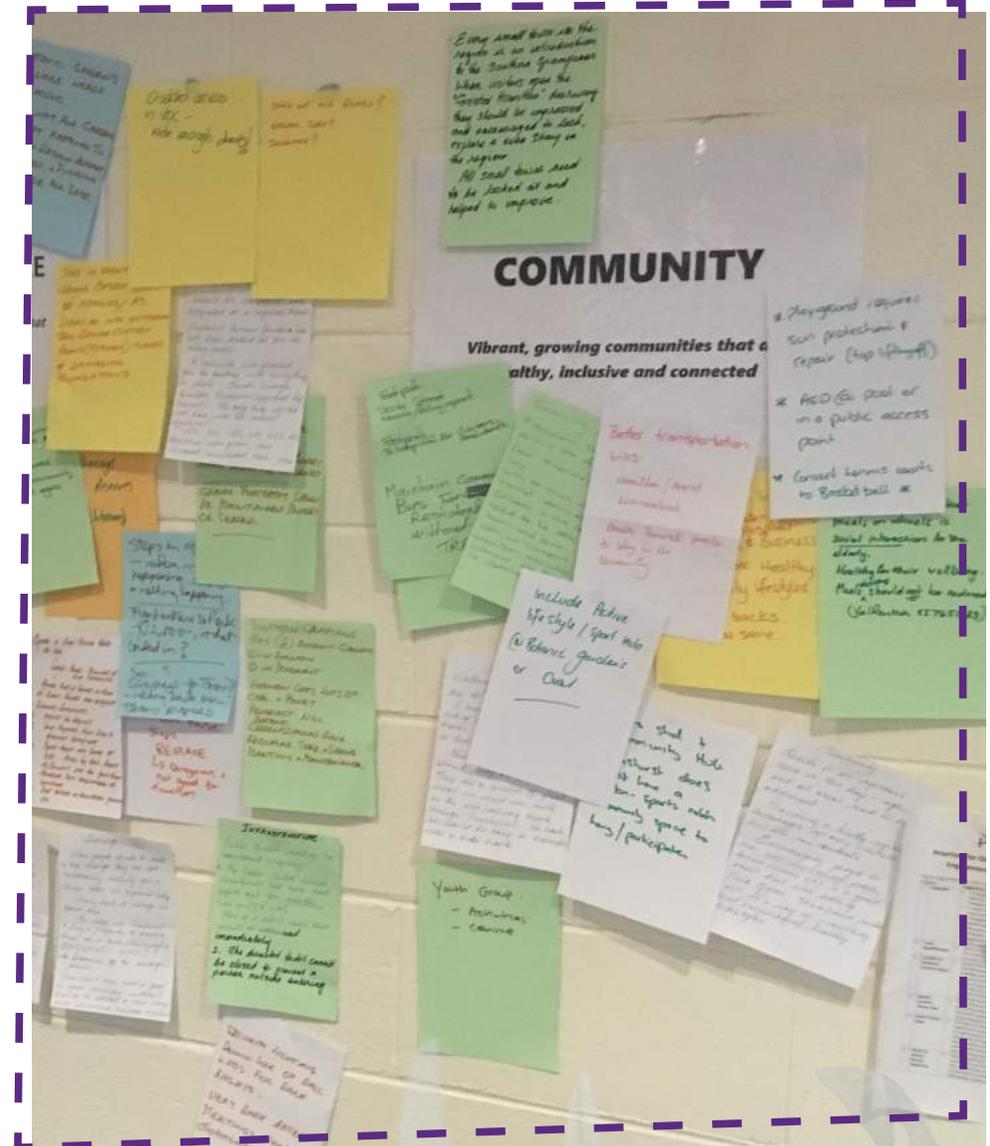
A WORD ABOUT IAP2
A GLOBAL STANDARD

The International Association for Public Participation, or IAP2, is an association which aims to promote and improve the practice of public participation. The IAP2 has developed an engagement spectrum which is widely used to describe the different levels of engagement that can be applied in a given situation. The spectrum ranges from a basic level of information through to empowering people to make their own decisions.

IAP2 SPECTRUM OF PARTICIPATION

The table below shows how the different categories on the engagement spectrum result in a different level of participation. The spectrum ranges from information provision to decision making being placed in the hands of the public. The table shows typical techniques for each level on the spectrum.

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATIVE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	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
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	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 the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals	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 work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
EXAMPLES	• Newsletters • Websites • Open houses • Media releases • Advertisements	• Public comment • Focus groups • Surveys • Public Meetings	• Workshops • Deliberative polling	• Stakeholder advisory committees • Consensus- building • Participatory decision-making	• Stakeholder juries • Ballots • Delegated decisions

VISION

Council is committed to developing strong, consistent and compelling messages and to creating strategies which successfully communicates these to key audiences. Our vision is for Southern Grampians Shire Council to be seen as a dynamic, responsive and professional organisation which values:

- Two-way communication as a means of understanding and meeting the needs of our diverse community;

- The sharing of information and key decisions with all stakeholders as a means of maintaining open and accountable governance and the trust that results from that; and

- Community members having right to know and contribute to decisions which affect them.

PRIMARY STAKEHOLDERS

Residents and Ratepayers

Councillors, Council Staff and Families

Community and Progress Associations

Local Business and Investors

Council Managed Entities

Local and State Media

SECONDARY STAKEHOLDERS

Professional Associations and Peak Bodies

Other Government Authorities

Key Government Departments and Agencies

LINKS TO OTHER COUNCIL
STRATEGIES AND PLANS

Sitting above the Communications and Engagement Strategy is the Southern Grampians Shire Council Plan 2017-2021.

The key Council Plan themes and objectives which influence this strategy include:

COUNCIL PLAN

1. Support our community

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
1.1 An empowered and resilient community	1.1.1 Communicate effectively with our community to promote understanding of Council's role and responsibilities and ensure communities are well informed of Council's activities, projects and decisions
	1.1.2 Provide opportunities for increased engagement and participation with community and Council
	1.1.4 Help build the capacity of the community to develop, review and implement their Community Plans

5. Provide Governance and Leadership

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
5.1 Provide transparent and responsible governance	5.1.1 Strengthen the governance role of Councillors by informing, resourcing, skilling and supporting their role
	5.1.3 Continue to increase the transparency of Council's decision making processes

DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Glenelg and Southern Grampians Digital Strategy details what the digital economy is, the potential impacts and opportunities and examines the existing local digital environment. It explores business, industry and community's digital capacity, discusses the leadership opportunities for Council and provides a strategic direction for both regions to fully maximise the full potential in embracing Australia's Digital Economy.

Some of the key strengths for Southern Grampians Shire, when compared to other similar councils include:

- Online web mapping

- Social media use and audience

- Electronic contact/enquiry forms

Some of key areas of improvement for the Council includes:

- Online community engagement – allowing residents to have their say online.

- Providing content for mobile phones (e.g. responsive web sites, mobile apps). Community expectations about accessing information online, from anywhere using phones continues to grow. This is especially important in some key markets (e.g. tourism).

- Expanding digitised services, such as online planning permit/ building permit tracking and submission.

WHAT YOU TOLD US ...

In a range of ways, over the last 12-18 months, we have sought feedback from community on Council's current methods of communications and engagement with residents and ratepayers, on how people prefer to be consulted with and on whether or not people believe Council is transparent.

Here's a summary of what you told us:

"Councilors should **be available** via email and phone to discuss concerns with, and with advice from SGSC management team to ensure that all **remain on track and accountable** for customer relations."

" I think **move with the times** as far as sharing information, FB, Twitter etc. "

"Open consultation/communication fosters understanding, and this in turn **leads to strong relationships**; this is true whether you look at families, communities or governance. When one part of this equation breaks down, the whole interaction and relationship suffers."

" Having council documents **freely available online**. "

"Consultation means that both parties need to **be prepared to listen** and take notice of what the other parties are saying. It seems to us, that this has not always been the case"

" **Transparency** could be improved by holding more public forums. "

" Relying on the local newspaper and council website probably is no longer sufficient and **social media** seems like a good strategy that allows near instant feedback. "

"Councils should engage with communities with more general meetings and be more transparent. **Council needs to listen to its ratepayers**. It needs to establish viable user groups. User groups should regularly meet with both Councilors and senior staff."

" It would be great to see more Consultation done via Facebook and other media, so that a **variety of opinions are heard** (Facebook/Spectator/SGSC website have very different audiences). "

"A column in the Hamilton Spectator should be devoted to **what is decided in council meetings** – secrecy just leads to rumours being spread!"

" The council should continue to **BE SEEN in the community** – to be part of the community and to be approachable 'off the book'. "

"I think many issues can be acted on by a **partnership between council and community**. I believe supporting community to **innovate economically and socially** is essential. Transparency is essential for community to trust council."

" **Improve communication** with non-Anglo Saxon business people. "

"Councilors should start walking the streets and **mixing with the people** they are supposed to represent and **ask for honest opinions**. Would be great for them and the community if they were seen outside presentations and election campaigns."

COMMUNICATIONS AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES

Based on what we know about our communities and what people told us through surveys and consultation we aim to achieve the following communications and community engagement outcomes:

Outcome One

Community is better informed and aware of Council services, role and activities

Outcome Two

Community receives accurate and meaningful messages from Council in a timely manner

Outcome Three

Council's relationship and reputation with the community is strengthened by effective and meaningful engagement

Outcome Four

Council spokespeople are active and visible in the community

Outcome Five

Council is transparent in its decision making

Outcome Six

Council staff are well informed and have the tools they need to effectively communicate and engage

Outcome One

COMMUNITY IS BETTER INFORMED AND AWARE OF COUNCIL SERVICES, ROLE AND ACTIVITIES.

In order to ensure the Community is better informed and aware of Council services, role and activities, we will employ the following strategies:

- Introduce a consistent 'look' to Council's information and communication material, activities, services and products Promote a positive image of the Southern Grampians region and ensure the community is well informed of Council's role services;

- Create greater awareness of activities and projects Council is undertaking; and

- Maintain a positive community profile of the organisation through effective and proactive media management

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Introduce a consistent look to Council's information and communication material, activities, services and products	Develop corporate style guide for Council including Greater Hamilton branding	Identify standards for presentation of visual and written information	High
	Develop consistent standard templates for Council material	Set consistent, professional, brand-compliant standards for all Council material (eg. fliers, forms, report covers, business cards and name badges).	Low
	Standardise written correspondence	Provide consistent format for written correspondence so outgoing material reflects standard style and branding.	Low
	Produce procedure and guidelines for marketing materials	Set guidelines for development and approval of external marketing material across organisation in order to meet brand and corporate guidelines.	Low
	Set up preferred supplier arrangements for graphic design services	Ensure consistency in pricing, service standards and visual standards.	Low
	Develop and maintain corporate image library	Give staff access to a comprehensive image database for exclusive use in development of corporate material and advertising.	Medium

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Create greater awareness of activities and projects Council is undertaking and build a positive profile of Council in the community.	Implement communications plans for Council's key priorities and projects	Create greater awareness of Council activities and projects and encourage a higher level of community understanding of certain projects, events or programs.	Medium
	Review effectiveness and desire from Community for current quarterly Southern Grampians News newsletter. Explore possibility of transitioning to a digital e-newsletters	Deliver information on Council priority projects, programs and community happenings direct to ratepayer and residents.	High
	Increase use of video to effectively convey range of Council services and our people	Create greater awareness of Council activities and projects and encourage a higher level of community understanding of certain projects, events or programs. Use story-telling to sell our most important asset – our people.	High
	Maintain a regular radio presence through structured weekly/monthly interviews – with ABC and Mixx FM, Radio 3HA	Deliver information on Council priority projects, programs, initiatives and community happenings in a timely manner. To be carried out to an agreed minimum standard and subject to budget.	Low
	Maintain a regular presence in print media through structured column in local and regional publications.	Fortnightly/Monthly Mayoral column in the Spectator to deliver information on Council projects, programs and community happenings in a timely manner. Also develop regional networks (eg. Warrnambool Standard, Weekly Times).	Low
	Maintain, update and expand information available on Council's website and social media platforms.	Deliver information on Council projects, programs and community happenings in a timely manner. Ensure information is easily accessible, clear and concise.	Medium
Ensure the community is well informed of Council's role and services	Produce Guide to Council services and facilities	Promote better understanding and improved use of Council services and facilities.	Low
	Identify and implement key messages for the organisation	Set direction for Council, ensure consistent and strategic approach to achieving key goals and provide a platform for updating the community on progress / milestones.	Medium
	Creation of SGSC app which allows real-time delivery of information and feedback opportunities to all residents and staff.	Deliver information on Council projects, programs and community happenings in a timely manner. Ensure information is easily accessible, clear and concise.	High

Outcome Two

COMMUNITY RECEIVES ACCURATE AND MEANINGFUL MESSAGES FROM COUNCIL IN A TIMELY MANNER.

In order to ensure the community receives accurate and meaningful messages across both digital and traditional mediums in a timely manner, Council will employ the following strategies:

- Maintain a website which is relevant, current and a frontline information source;

- Promote use of Council's website as a key source of information; and

- Ensure strategic use of social media platforms (Facebook, Titter, Instagram, Snapchat etc) as a key source of information and provide engaging content.

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Maintain a website which is relevant, current and a frontline information source	Further development of Council's website to make it a Primary source of information for Residents and ratepayers	Provide information on Council and community services in a user friendly engaging format which and engaging format that encourages interaction, enhances appeal and increases usage.	Medium
Promote use of Council's website and social media platforms as a key source of information	Develop and initiate web promotional program	Promote Council's updated website and social media platforms to encourage use and visits. Include messages on all correspondence or documentation to remind residents and ratepayers that they can access particular information on Council's website or via social media platforms.	Medium
	Educate staff on website content	Provide staff access to key information which they can pass on through their networks. Utilise induction process.	Low
Create and Maintain Engagement/ Feedback Database	Use available technology to keep a 'log' of local, residents who wish to access further information or who have a particular comment on an issue. Can be linked to electronic newsletter.	The engagement/feedback database will establish a central pool of members within our local community who have indicated they want to be informed of, and participate in Council's community engagement activities or have provided feedback on a particular issue. The data-base is established online through a register on the website. Interested residents can also register manually if they do not have internet access. The management of the data-base sits within Community Relations, and can be used across the organisation to inform our local community on consultation activities	High

Outcome Three

COUNCIL'S RELATIONSHIP AND REPUTATION WITH THE COMMUNITY IS STRENGTHENED BY EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT

In order to improve Council's relationship with the community and encourage community involvement, Council staff will employ the following strategies:

- Be visually active within the community;

- Obtain community commitment to the implementation of projects through committees and / or structured consultation;

- Seek community feedback regarding services;

- Respond to queries, complaints and feedback from the community; and

- Develop initiatives to respectfully and effectively engage with Indigenous community.

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Be visually active within community.	Increase Council presence at community events, initiatives, development group meetings and other happenings	To increase knowledge of community issues and initiatives while strengthening local and cross- community ties. To show support for local events, and to encourage one-on-one feedback.	Low
	Produce Engagement guidelines and toolkit for use by Staff	Give guidance to staff and ensure a coordinated and consistent approach to community engagement is delivered across the organisation	Medium
	Use current Council assets (eg Mobile Library) to facilitate community visits and allow engagement at level of the resident. Take advantage of the successful 'Listening Post' model.	Better utllisation of Council assets and allowing more relaxed method of engaging with Council on whatever topics may be of interest.	High

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Obtain community commitment to implementation of projects through committees and / or structured consultation.	Identify and facilitate community projects	Provide an integrated approach to development of projects and programs and strengthen them with community input. To encourage leadership and volunteerism.	Medium
	Facilitate regular community consultation activities	Work with the community to identify priorities for Council work programs or activities.	Medium
	Review the Council's web-based engagement tool to ensure best value. Implement streaming web-based engagement sessions allowing immediate feedback/query.	Provide an opportunity for effective and innovative online engagement.	High
Seek feedback regarding services	Review community feedback forms and website link	Give residents a means of providing feedback to Council.	Low
	Conduct external benchmarking survey	Assess community satisfaction with Council, and identify areas for improvement. Use data to initiate organisation-wide improvements and measure future success.	Low
Respond to queries, complaints or feedback	Review collection of information in line with new software implementation (eg use phone system and CRM to do what it is deigned to do).	Collate information gathered through feedback process to use as a guide to future requirements and improvements	Medium
Developing initiatives to respectfully and effectively engage with Indigenous community	Creation of an internal working party to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan, including specified engagement model.	Effectively communicate with Indigenous groups and ensure feedback is used to develop relevant Council Plans/Strategies and Activities.	Medium
Developing initiatives to respectfully and effectively engage with the aged and disability sector	Trageted engagement at industry level	Increase engagement outcomes through participation rate increase.	High

Outcome Four

COUNCIL SPOKESPEOPLE ARE ACTIVE AND VISIBLE IN THE COMMUNITY

In order to ensure Council's spokespeople are active and visible in the community, Council will employ the following strategies:

- Obtain community commitment to the implementation of projects through committees and / or structured consultation;

- Seek community feedback regarding services;

- Respond to queries, complaints and feedback from the community;

- Provide opportunities for senior staff to act as spokespeople for respective projects; and

- Embed the concept that all staff are representatives of Council into organisational culture

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Be visually active within the community	Increase Council presence at community events, initiatives, development group meetings and other happenings	To increase knowledge of community issues and initiatives while strengthening local and cross-community ties. To show support for local events, and to encourage one-on-one feedback.	Low
	Use current Council assets (eg Mobile Library) to facilitate community visits and allow engagement at level of the resident.	Better utllisation of Council assets and allowing more relaxed method of engaging with Council on whatever topics may be of interest.	High
Provide opportunities for senior staff to act as spokespeople for respective projects	Allow those senor staff or project coordinators with expertise and knowledge to 'speak' to particular projects or initiatives.	Create a wider pool of known Council staff and decrease dependence on CEO and Mayor for media/promotional roles.	Low
	Introduce volunteering program for Council staff	To recognise and reward staff for significant amounts of time spent volunteering with community groups or at community events / initiatives. To encourage staff to volunteer.	Low

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Obtain community commitment to the implementation of projects through use of committees and / or structured consultation.	Identify and facilitate community projects	Provide an integrated approach to development of projects and programs and strengthen them with community input. To encourage leadership and volunteerism.	Medium
	Facilitate regular community consultation activities (eg Community Engagement visits)	Work with the community to identify priorities for Council work programs or activities.	Medium

Outcome Five

COUNCIL IS TRANSPARENT IN ITS DECISION MAKING

In order to ensure Council is transparent in its decision making and is committed to keeping the community informed of the decisions that affect them

- Information readily available and easy to understand;

- Timely communication of decisions made; and

- Ensure Annual Report clearly articulates projects, initiatives, decisions and spending

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Information is readily available and easy to understand.	Include Council meeting minutes and agenda on all Council platforms.	Ensure transparency and accurate conveying of decisions reached by elected members.	Medium
	Actively promote the timing and location of Council meetings.	Encourages more residents to understand the decision making process.	Medium
	Continue process of holding Council meetings in townships.	Allows those residents of outlying townships access to the decision making process and helps with elected members' visibility.	Low
Timely communication of decisions made	Timely update of Council website and social media platforms following Council Meetings to deliver key meeting outcomes. Live streaming of Council meetings	To ensure messages surrounding community decisions are available to the public in a timely manner.	High
Ensure Annual Report clearly articulates projects, initiatives, decisions and spending.	Deliver accurate and timely annual report and provide in electronic and active fashion.	Provide an accurate resource to residents and ratepayers and allows the organization to celebrate success.	Low

Outcome Six

COUNCIL STAFF ARE WELL INFORMED AND HAVE THE TOOLS THEY NEED TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE

In order to deliver effective internal communication, Council will employ the following strategies:

- Deliver frequent information to staff regarding Council news, activities, services and functions

- Encourage positive staff to staff communication

- Support Councillors Managers, Directors and key staff in developing communication skills

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Deliver frequent information to staff regarding Council news, activities, services and functions	Evaluate effectiveness of 'The Exchange' through staff survey.	Assess need and effectiveness of this regular bulletin to keep staff up to date with information on the organisation, training opportunities, staff recruitment and achievements, major project updates and Council decisions.	Medium
	Complete development of intranet site as part of website redevelopment project	Internal web system that all staff can access. Daily News section for more regular updated than provided in 'The Exchange'. Incorporate interactive component including message/discussions boards, for sale noticeboard and integrate with civica for accessing leave totals, pay slips etc.	Low
	Roll out email addresses and access to Intranet to all staff across organisation	Ensuring all staff including outdoor workers and home care workers are provided with an email address and a central computer on their worksite to access emails.	Medium
	Evaluate effectiveness of Monthly Information session	Determine if the sessions continue or if an alternative should be identified.	High
	Creation of internal staff 'app' which allows real-time delivery of information to all staff with access to a smart phone	To be used as an alternative to The Exchange and integrate with Intranet for access to information (eg phone numbers, staff calendars)	High
	Make use of current team meetings for Executive team to attend and deliver important information.	Create an information sharing platform where it already exists.	High

STRATEGY	ACTIONS	PURPOSE / OUTCOME	PRIORITY
Encourage positive staff to staff communication	Hold regular staff meetings and social events	Encourage staff interaction and build a strong team dynamic. Provide avenue for exchange of information.	Low
	Conduct annual /quarterly staff survey	Gauge employee satisfaction and identify areas for organisational improvement. To be completed in conjunction with Organisational Development Team approach.	Low
Support Councillors, Managers, Directors and key staff in developing communication skills	Introduce communication support program	Provide ongoing support for Councillors, managers, directors and key staff, including training in engagement techniques, communication and marketing. Give guidance choosing effective communications tools and developing communication strategies	Medium

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