STRATFORD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Communications & Engagement Strategy
2020

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STRATFORD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Contents

Purpose

This strategy has been prepared as a framework to support communication and engagement between Stratford District Council ('Council' 'we') and the community.

We have developed the strategy to:

- understand community satisfaction and expectations of Council in the areas of communication and community engagement;

- analyse Council's current process in communications and engagement;

- identify new initiatives that will support Council's commitment to communicate and engage in a way that encourages an open, transparent relationship between the community and Council

Introduction

What is Communication and Engagement?

By 'communication', we mean:

a) All our published documents, including leaflets, publications (e.g. annual report), website content, engagement and consultation documents, presentations and advertisements used to deliver messages to different audiences, including our residents, wider community, staff and external stakeholder groups

b) All statements and comments issued to the media

c) All face-to-face meetings, events and telephone conversations where we are hosting or organising the activities

d) Materials that are produced to help 'inform' residents and the community, which may be 'one-way' communication at times

By 'engagement', we mean:

a) Activities that are specifically designed to find out the experiences and views of the community

b) Using a variety of methods depending on what is required and is most appropriate (moving away from a one size fits all approach), including the use of engagement and consultation events, structured discussions (e.g. focus groups, interviews), surveys or advisory groups

c) Relationships with statutory partners and local partnerships including the voluntary and community sector, elected members and opinion leaders

d) The ways in which we feed back the results of engagement activities, and make clear how these have been taken into account when making decisions.

Legislation

The Local Government Act 2002 (the Act) is the primary act that drives engagement and communications between Council and its community.

The Act includes a series of principles which are intended to govern the overall actions of local authorities, and includes principles relating to the conduct of business in an open and transparent manner; making itself aware of community views; providing opportunities for Māori to participate in decision-making processes; collaborating and cooperating with other local authorities as appropriate; ensuring prudent stewardship of resources; and taking a sustainable development approach.

Some sections of the Act specifically relate to planning, decision-making, consultation and accountability:

Part 6 – 76AA Significance and Engagement Policy

Part 6 – 78 Community Views in Relation to Decisions

Part 6 – 81 Contributions to decision-making processes by Māori

Part 6 – 82 Principles of Consultation

Also very relevant to local government is the engagement/consultation required as part of the Resource Management Act and the Reserves Act.

The Communications and Engagement Strategy provides a consistent approach for Council to give effect to the principles in the Local Government Act 2002.

Summary of other legislation that relates to Local Government activities can be found at www.localcouncils.govt.nz/lgip. nsf/wpg_url/Policy-LocalGovernment-Legislation-Other-legislation

District profile

Our Council

Council manages a wide range of services for our people, including planning and resource consents, water services, rubbish and recycling, roads and transport, parks and reserves, economic and community development initiatives, and community facilities like the library and swimming pool.

Our district is one of New Zealand's smallest local authority areas. We encompass just 2,170 square kilometres and within this have four distinct landscape regions:

- The alpine and bush environment of the Egmont National Park.

- The dairy farming country of the Egmont ring-plain.
- The frontal hill country. This land lies between the ring plain and the eastern hill country. It is mostly used for sheep and beef farming.
- The steep hill-country of eastern Taranaki, some areas of which are farmed mostly for sheep and beef farming.

Our district borders two national parks, Egmont National Park and Whanganui National Park. We are a main gateway to Taranaki Mounga including popular tourist sites Dawson Falls and Manganui

Ski Field. We are intersected by State Highway 3 and State Highway 43 (Forgotten World Highway) which connects Stratford township to our smaller towns including the Republic of Whangamomona and beyond to Taumaranui.

Within our district we have 10 primary schools and two secondary schools.

Our diverse audience

We often need to communicate and engage with specific people on different challenges and opportunities. For the purpose of this strategy we have listed these in the below key audience groups:

Stratford district community

- Ratepayers
- Residents
- Businesses and industry
- Community, sporting and social clubs
- Education service
- Volunteers
- Key service users
  - young people
  - older people
  - people with a disability

Elected members and employees

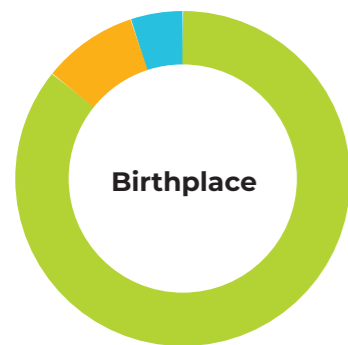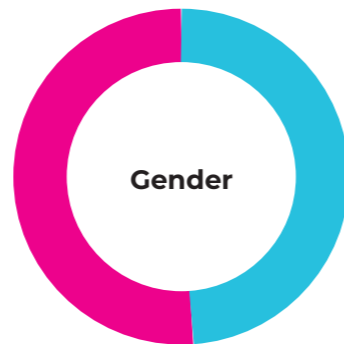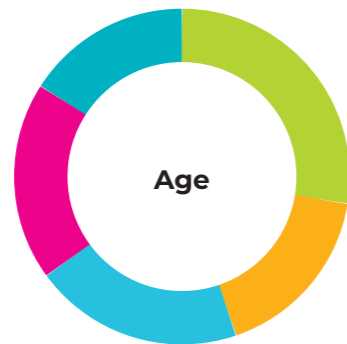**Visitors to the district / tourists**

Partners/who we work with

- Government agencies
- Members of Parliament
- Other local authorities
- Media
- Iwi
- Contractors and suppliers
- Consultants

Our community

We have 8,991 residents (2013 census) who live in the heart of Taranaki and call the Stratford district their home, and this figure is predicted to grow. The majority of our population live in the Stratford township. We have a number of smaller satellite towns including Midhirst, Toko and Whangamomona with some of our rural community members living in very remote parts of the district.

Data sourced from Infometrics.co.nz

Age

Under 19 year olds	28%
20 to 34 year olds	17%
35 to 49 year olds	20%
50 to 64 year olds	19%
65 years +	16%

Gender

Male	49%
Female	51%

Birthplace

NZ born	86%
Overseas born	9%
Not provided	5%

Employment

Employed	62.5%
Unemployed	3.5%
Not in the labour force	30%
Not provided	4%

Ethnicity

European	88%	Māori	11%
Asian	2%	Pasifika	0.5%
Other	2%	Not provided	4.5%

How we work now

Communicating with our diverse audience is important to ensure we have a well-informed community that has been provided the opportunity to engage with Council.

Council recognises that different people have different needs when it comes to communication and engagement. In any one community there are two ends of the spectrum: those who don't want to be bothered by Council at all, and those who want more ongoing involvement in initiatives to improve the area.

Through our existing relationships with stakeholders, learnings from previous consultation and engagement work and community feedback, we determine the best channel(s) to meet the needs and wants of the full spectrum of stakeholders.

The following Stakeholders Matrix displays the communication and engagement channels Council currently uses to meet these needs. It provides guidance on targeted communications and supports with managing our communication resources in the most efficient and cost effective way.

● Currently available
△ Aim to provide

		Mail			Media and Print					Digital							Customer Experience				Community Engagement					
		Rates notices inserts	Direct Mail (letters/email)	Letterbox drop	Media release	Radio	Print advertising	Publications	Promotional materials	Digital advertising	Social Media	Email invoicing/e-rates	Email marketing	Website	Intranet	Mobile updates (APPs/SMS)	Council service centres	Face-to-face	Meetings	Telephone	Community events	Surveys	Workshops	Online Forums	Information stalls	Noticeboards
Stakeholders																										
SDC	Elected members		●		●	●	●				●			●		△	●	●	●	●	●		●			
	Committee Members		●		●	●	●				●			●		△	●	●	●	●	●		●			
	Senior Leadership		●		●	●								●				●	●	●						
	Staff		●		●	●	●				●			●	△	△		●	●	●	●					
Stratford district community	Residents		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	△	●		△	●	●	●	●	●	●	△	△		●
	Ratepayers	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	△	●		△	●	●	●	●	●	●	△	△		●
	Businesses and industry		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	△	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●		△		●
	Community Organisations/ Clubs		●		●	●	●	●	●		●		△	●		△	●	●	●	●	●	●	△	△	△	●
	Education services		●		●	●	●	●			△		●			●	●	●	●	●	●		△	●		
	Older people (65 years +)			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		△	●		△	●	●	●	●	●		△	●	●	
	Young people (12-24 years)		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		△	●		△		●		●	●	●	●	△	●	●	
	People with a disability		●	●	●	●	●		●		△		●		△	●	●	●	●	●		●	△		●	
	Volunteers		●		●					●		△	●		△	●	●	●	●	●		●	△			
Visitors/tourists			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		△	●		△	●			●					●	
Partners we work with	Media		●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●				●	●	●	●						
	Iwi		●			●	●	●				●				●	●					△				
	Contractors and suppliers		●	●	●	●	●	●			△		●			●	●	●	●		●					
	Consultants		●									●				●	●		●			●				
	Other local authorities		●	●		●	●		●			●				●	●	●	●							
	Government agencies		●								●					●	●									
	Members of parliment		●								●					●	●	●								

How are we performing?

In preparing this Strategy we have considered feedback from our annual Customer Satisfaction Survey, outcomes of internal review work, and comments from elected members and members of the public through other forms of feedback.

The feedback from the community, staff and elected members has been invaluable and has helped us identify:

- Who makes up our community?
- Community needs in the way of communications and engagement
- What we're doing well and what we can improve
- Strategies to meet the needs and wants of our community

2018/19 Customer Satisfaction Survey results

Key themes

- Overall room for improvement in the way Council communicates and engages with community members on Council functions.
- Those who respond to current engagement opportunities are not a representative cross section of the community.
- Some people simply don't know if Council is making decisions in their best interest because they aren't engaged with the process, or aware of the decisions Council is making at all.
- Identified challenges of communicating to a diverse audience, a "one size fits all" approach impossible, everyone wants something different.
- A need for more transparency in Council decision making

Stats

- 32.15% of respondents "don't know" if Council's decisions represent the best interests of the district.
- 81.08% of respondents are satisfied with the amount of consultation that Council offers.
- 95.35% of respondents know where to get Council information from
- 95.62% use the local newspaper to keep up to date with Council information.
- 33.97% use Council's website
- 21.82% use Council's Facebook page

When asked how you'd most like to receive information about Council in the future, 88.14% of respondents said newspapers, 27.27% said Council's website, 24.11% said Council's Facebook, 18.18% said email updates and 23.12% said personal contact by phoning or visiting Council's Service Centre.

Feedback

- "Website could be easier to navigate"
- "I feel there is a disconnect between the council and the community."
- "Could special notices such as 'Water restrictions' be sent to all ratepayers (and other groups) in a group email?"
- "Some people don't have computers or cell phones or email."
- "Council staff are always friendly and super helpful, whether it be by phone or in person. Facebook page updates are great but council must remember that not all of the community have access to social media/websites."
- "I love that Stratford Council have a Facebook page. The information posted is greatly appreciated Ie, letting us know about water supply"
- "I have always found the standard of customer service outstanding and queries have always been well received and dealt with by all staff."

Social Media engagement

As of February 2020 Council's active social media presence includes:

f	Stratford District Council	2,459 follows	2,313 likes
f	Stratford Library	532 follows	510 likes
f	TSB Pool Complex	1,551 follows	1,495 likes
f	Stratford District Animal Control	773 follows	753 likes
f	Stratford District Youth Council	594 follows	561 likes
◎	Stratford i-SITE	283 followers	
◎	Stratford District Youth Council	181 followers	
◎	TSB Pool Complex	229 followers	

We manage and monitor our social media platforms on a daily basis and can view insights on all posts (paid and organic content). Our social media platforms are continuing to trend upwards in audience reach.

SWOT Analysis

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Strengths

- Small community, eager to be involved
- Good existing relationships with community groups and influencers
- Good access to communication channels that community members are engaged with
- Committed to improving community based decision making
- Elected members advocating for and engaging with both rural and urban communities

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Weaknesses

- Limited funding for new communication methods
- Limited resources to effectively manage community expectations re communication and engagement
- An outdated community directory
- Inconsistent approach to Council branded communications

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Opportunities

- An increasing captive social media audience
- Increasing online services
- Enhance interactive engagement through the use of advances in technology
- Improving iwi relationships
- Through this strategy, an approach that is practical, innovative and integrated
- Improved measures for communications and engagement
- A community that feels supported, engaged and informed by Council

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Threats

- Difficult decision making leading to disengagement / lack of trust
- Commercial sensitivity of some decisions, and increasing need to protect information under the Privacy Act
- Reputational risks
- Role of local authorities changing

How we want to work going forward

Our Communications and Engagement Vision

An engaged community, where everyone feels connected and able to participate in decision making opportunities.

Our principles

Informative **Proactive** **Engaging** **Accessible** **Customer-centred**

Connecting with our community

Council believes that by encouraging open conversations on community challenges and opportunities we can improve our delivery of service and empower our community.

The below framework will be used to support Council when delivering the objectives set out in this Strategy.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) developed a framework for engagement which is considered a best practice benchmark worldwide.

The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum gives a guide on the five levels of public participation, from informing to empowering, and the types of communication suitable for each. The purpose of the spectrum is to improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating key stakeholders that affect the public interest. In simply 'informing' stakeholders, there is no expectation of receiving feedback and consequently there is a low level of public interest or impact. At the other end of the spectrum, 'empowering' stakeholders to make decisions implies an increase in expectations and therefore an increased level of public impact.

Differing levels of engagement may be required when engaging on an issue, and for different stakeholders. It will not always be appropriate or practicable to conduct engagement at the 'collaborate' or 'empower' end of this spectrum. Some topics of interest or issues will not need such an involved approach.

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	One-way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.	Two-way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas on rationale, alternatives and proposals to inform decision making.	Public participation in the process, designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision-making.	Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions.	The final decision making is in the hands of the public. Under the LGA 2002, the Mayor and Councillors are elected to make decisions on behalf of their constituents.
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the 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 that 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.
Example tools	• Factsheet • Website • Social media • Public notices	• Formal submissions and hearings • Focus groups • Online surveys	• Workshops • Focus groups	• External working groups (involving community experts)	• Binding referendum • Local body elections

Alongside the IAP2 Framework and Stakeholders Matrix, this Strategy will align with the principles set out in Council's Relationships Framework and Policy in order to provide a consistent approach to engaging and collaborating with external community focused groups.

Key initiatives

While this strategy outlines in further detail the objectives we will implement, the below are six key initiatives that Council will focus on over the next two years.

- **New website functionality** – to improve functionality, stability and overall user experience of the website.
- **Brand audit** – complete an audit of Council's brand to ensure a consistent, recognised and strengthened brand is applied to the district.
- **Iwi engagement** – work with iwi and hapū on developing an engagement framework.
- **Research and insights** – improve the way we measure communications and engagement within the community to better improve our delivery.
- **Community engagement** – use this strategy to implement a number of initiatives to ensure Council works towards best practice standards and to further embed engagement initiatives into Council's project management.
- **Digital communications** – use this strategy to implement a plan to grow our online community and engage more through social media and email communications.

Our strategic aims and objectives

These aims and objectives are a combination of Council's legislated requirements to enable democratic local decision-making and promoting the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Stratford districts communities, while undertaking the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain understanding between Council and the community.

Internal Communications

Aim

Establish a culture that strengthens internal communication and provide staff with the tools to enhance the way Council engages with the community.

Objective	Outcome
Develop a communications toolkit for staff	Planned and effective communications for our community, resulting from a collaborative approach
Create a writing style guide for Council staff	Establish an internal culture of writing that uses plain language and is fit for purpose
Provide support and training to staff members to assist them to determine community engagement requirements on a project by project basis	Establish a consistent culture of community engagement where staff are aware of Council's policies and procedures in considering engagement as early as possible in the project's development.
Implement media protocols/policy for Council staff	Better informed community through consistent communication
Create a writing for the web guide for Council staff	Establish internal culture of writing for the web that results in timely and effective web communications

Community engagement

Aim

Liaise with the community on relevant projects to ensure all stakeholders are informed, and create meaningful engagement opportunities seeking community feedback that is considered as part of the decision making process.

Objective	Outcome
Review and revise the Community Directory	Council has a robust and up to date Community Directory
Proactively seek new opportunities and innovative ways for elected members to engage with the community	Provide community with more open and informal opportunities to discuss issues and ideas with Council
Educate the community on the engagement and consultation process	Increased understanding leading to engaged discussions where our community feel part of Council decision making
Proactively seek new opportunities to engage with our key audience groups	All members of our community feel informed and engage with Council on services, event, initiatives and projects
Develop an engagement framework with iwi and hapū	Engagement processes established between council, iwi and hapū
Review and revise the Significance and Engagement Policy	Council has an updated policy in place that assists Council to execute best practice community engagement by identifying the appropriate level of engagement for each project

Visual communications

Aim

Ensure Council's online presence and printed publications strengthen our brand via creative, informative and engaging communications.

Objective	Outcome
Implement an updated brand style guide for the organisation	Consistent approach to Council produced publications
Review Council's Signage Policy	Consistent approach to signage throughout the district
Endorse a united brand identity for Council, the district and our Shakespearean identity	Consistent, recognised and strengthened brand that promotes our unique identity
Improve/increase access to approved promotional images	Consistent, recognised and strengthened brand that promotes our district and the people who live here

Digital communications

Aim

Connect with and build relationships online with our community by developing engaging and valuable two-way conversations. Be the central point of contact online, enabling 24/7 access to information and services to our customers.

Objective	Outcome
Improve Council's online presence through the development of a new website	Provide a modern, user-friendly, multi-media rich platform that is engaging and meets web accessibility standards
Improve Council's social media presence by building awareness and exposure of Council's social media channels	Increase community awareness and participation in Council social media channels
Review current Council smart phone applications and proactively seek new initiatives in this space	Access to relevant information as the customers time-of-need

Media relations

Aim

Deliver clear, consistent and factual information to the media to ensure positive and accurate coverage of Council decisions and activities.

Objective	Outcome
Extend traditional media to include digital distribution of messages	Reach more people with information on Council services, events, initiatives and projects
Have most up to date key Council information available on website	Better informed community through accessible information
Build on relationships with local media	Better informed community through consistent and accurate information sharing
Seek opportunities for spokesperson interviews across media outlets	Increased awareness of Council services, events, initiatives and projects

External Communications

Aim

Deliver planned, transparent and effective communications by using multiple digital and print mediums that are cost effective, innovative and specific to our community.

Objective	Outcome
Review use of existing communications tools/channels	Targeted communications based on community interest and needs
Realign resources from traditional communications to digital communications to meet the growing demand for information and engagement online	New and creative mediums for increased exposure to Council services, events, initiatives and projects through cost-effective options
Proactively seek new opportunities and innovative ways to communicate with the community	Reach more people with information on Council services, events, initiatives and projects

Where to from here

Council will develop a work plan that supports this strategy. Progress on the initiatives and objectives highlighted will be reported to elected members on a regular basis, and shared with the wider community.

The strategy will be reviewed every three years or as needed.

How will we work? ▶ **What will we need to do?** ▶ **What will we focus on first?** ▶ **What will success look like?**

Everything we do will align with our principles:
- Informative
- Proactive
- Engaging
- Customer Centred
- Accessible

Develop a work plan to support the objectives identified in this Strategy.

- New website functionality
- Brand audit
- Iwi engagement
- Research and insights
- Community engagement
- Digital communications

- Better informed community
- People engaging with Council
- Consistent, recognised and strengthened identity
- Improved and sustained stakeholder relationships

Related documents

- Significance and Engagement Policy
- Media Policy
- Relationships Framework
- Relationships Policy
- Community Development Strategy
- Long Term Plan 2018 – 28
- Annual Plan

Glossary

Our Council	Elected members, staff and the policies and guidelines that deliver the services, events, projects and initiatives
Our district	The area that Stratford District Council services and people, organisations, businesses within it
Our Community	The people who make up the Stratford district, the key stakeholders and audiences who we wish to communicate and engage with
Services	An ongoing deliver of an expected community service
Event	A community-focused event
Initiative	A partnership based delivery or community service
Project	A partnership based delivery or community service

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