



Communications and Community Engagement Strategy 2015 - 2018



Keeping people informed and involved in decision-making, makes Surf Coast Shire a better place to live, work and visit.

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Introduction

We believe that by keeping people informed and inviting them to take part in decision-making, Surf Coast Shire will be a better place to live, work and visit. This Communications and Community Engagement Strategy has been prepared with this ambition in mind.

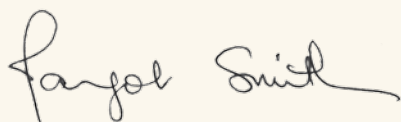
The strategy will serve as the guiding document for the Council's communications and engagement activities. It sets out our main objectives and details the ways in which we plan to achieve these objectives. The strategy is underpinned by a great deal of research, conversations, consultations, and testing of ideas. It has been developed with the assistance of many community members and stakeholders. Each person we engaged with has added to our knowledge and helped us shape our plans. Thank you.

Our first step in preparing the strategy was to confirm four fundamental beliefs. Each time we communicate and engage with our community we commit to being Trustworthy, Responsive, Simple and Progressive. These four beliefs will be put into practice when delivering this strategy.

This strategy has a three year time span after which it will be fully reviewed. In the mean time we will make annual updates to allow for budget cycles, changes in focus, community priorities, even new technology.

The strategy is our roadmap for the next three years. Some of the actions will begin straight away, others may be subject to consideration in future budgets.

The Communications and Community Engagement Strategy is an important document for the Council. Members of the community have told us timely, easily understood information about Council decisions and services is very important. Equally, our community consistently says it wants the opportunity to be involved



Cr Margot Smith, Mayor



in decision making. In adopting its Communications and Community Engagement Strategy, Council is signalling that we agree.

The Surf Coast Shire is diverse both geographically and in the make-up of its population. We are mindful there is no one approach that will fit all people, or all circumstances. We will do all we can to overcome this challenge. We think technology can help. For example, digital media can help break down geographic barriers and cost constraints. Of course many people will still prefer traditional media so we will endeavour to communicate as broadly as we can across all channels.

Surf Coast Shire delivers many different and distinct services. One of our challenges is to make sure we work efficiently and communicate well within our organisation. Internal communication and engagement is therefore an important part of our strategy. Communicating well within our organisation is essential to communicating and engaging well with our community.

We know mistakes can happen and dealing with them properly is incredibly important. Our strategy commits to acknowledge and communicate when mistakes are made. We will then remedy the situation and do all we can to avoid repeating the same error.

Be assured we will continue to test our ideas as we go. We will check with the community what is working and what needs to evolve through the life of the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy.



Keith Baillie, CEO



Our Philosophy. Our Promise

There are four fundamental beliefs that guide our Communications and Community Engagement practice.

Trustworthy

Community members have a right to know and contribute to decisions which affect them

Responsive

The timing of our communication is in step with community expectations

Simple

Communications and engagement practices must be easy to understand

Progressive

We introduce innovative new ways to improve communications and community engagement



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 Public 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.

Increasing level of public impact >>

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	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	<i>'We will keep you informed.'</i>	<i>'We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.'</i>	<i>'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.'</i>	<i>'We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.'</i>	<i>'We will implement what you decide.'</i>
Example techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fact sheets. • Web sites. • Open houses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public comment. • Focus groups. • Surveys • Public meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops. • Deliberative polling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen advisory committees. • Consensus building. • Participatory decision making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen juries. • Ballots. • Delegated decision.

How are we performing?

Every journey has a beginning and a destination. Before deciding on our end goals we looked closely at how the Surf Coast Shire was currently performing in areas such as communications, community engagement, advocacy, customer service and overall council direction.

We drew on opinions gathered from many sources including the Victorian Government's annual Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey, and the feedback received during the drafting of our Council Plan 2013-2017, Health and Wellbeing Plan and Customer Service Charter.

2014 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey

(sample of 600 people, conducted by the Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure).¹

	Surf Coast Shire			Large Rural Shires	State-wide
	2012	2013	2014	2014	2014
Overall performance	59	61	64	57	61
Community Consultation	56	58	59	55	57
Advocacy	51	53	57	54	56
Customer Service	70	71	71	68	72
Overall Council Direction	51	57	57	51	53

The table above provides a summary of survey results for key categories. Surf Coast Shire's performance is above the average for comparable large rural shires and compares favourably with the state-wide average.

When asked to rate the importance of all areas of council operations people ranked categories related to communications and community engagement amongst the most important of all 26 service categories.

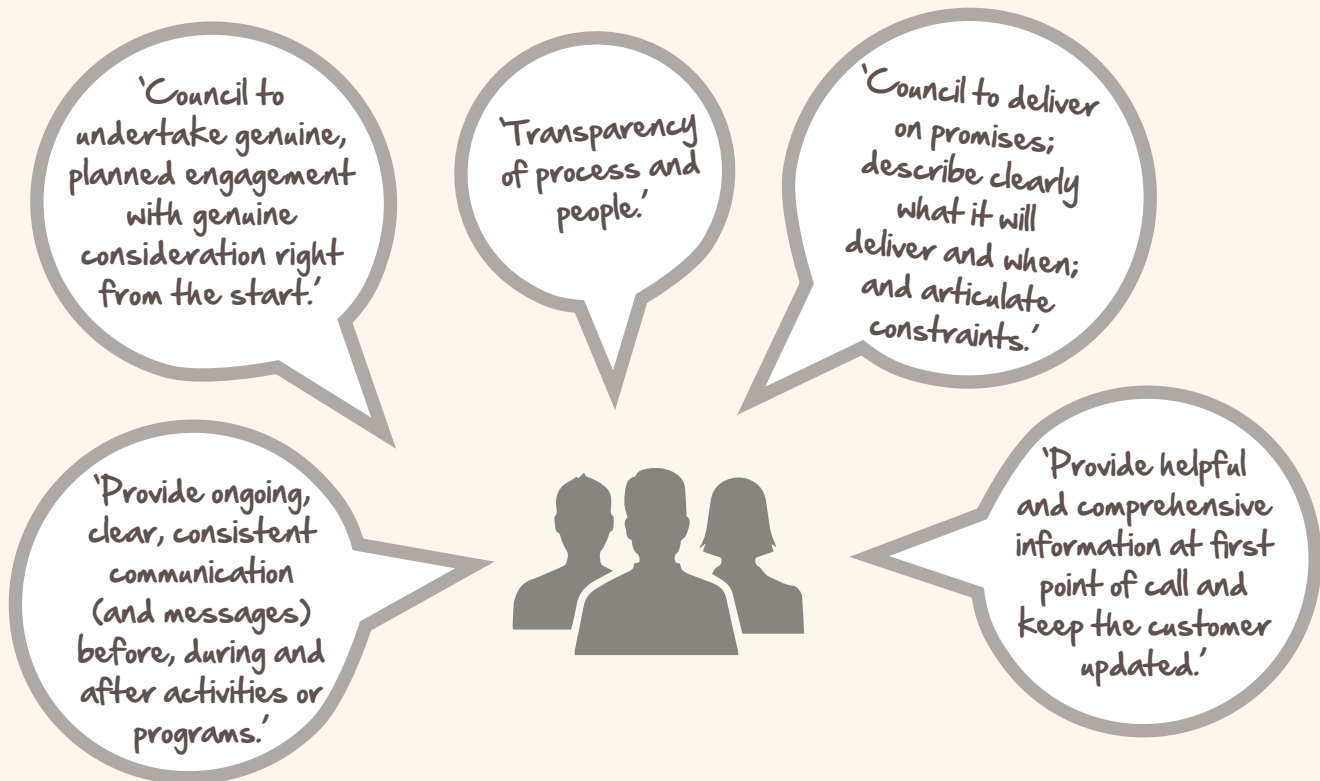
Service Area	Importance ranking
Emergency and Disaster Management	1
Community decisions	2
Population Growth	3
Environmental Sustainability	4
Consultation and Engagement	5
Informing the Community	6

¹ Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey 2014



What you told us

When we did research as part of Council's Customer Service Charter community members said they expect:



Customer Service Charter Results

(sample of 350 people, 2013)

	Not at all satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Total Disatisfied	Quite Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Total Satisfied
Provide you with clear and relevant information	7%	14%	21%	31%	38%	69%
Make decisions that are consistent, fair and in line with Council policies and legislation	10%	14%	24%	29%	22%	51%
Be accountable for our decisions and how they were made	10%	16%	26%	29%	25%	54%
Conduct surveys to measure our performance	4%	10%	14%	34%	34%	68%

Note: not all results equal 100% as some respondents had not experienced the service category.



What you told us

Feedback received during the preparation of the Council Plan 2013-2017 further highlights the importance our community places on communications and community engagement:

'Communities want to be engaged with Council at all levels, so Council hears about what the community wants before decisions are made. Communities want to know when Council is holding events, how to get involved and want us to ensure we structure activities to maximise opportunities for community involvement.'



'The community wants clarity on how its involvement will be used and what influence its input will have on Council decision making.'

'Feedback identified that Council needs to be more proactive with communications and work more closely with the media to keep the community informed. People want to be kept informed of progress on issues and requests.'



Our Community



The Surf Coast Shire encompasses beach, bushland and rural environments and is home to nine distinct townships; Aireys Inlet, Anglesea, Deans Marsh, Fairhaven, Jan Juc, Lorne, Moriac, Torquay and Winchelsea. Each township has a strong sense of community and identity.

Surf Coast Shire is one of the fastest growing Victorian municipalities. Since 2006 annual population growth has averaged 3.4 per cent. The residential population grew from 20,556 in 2001 to an estimated 29,247 in 2014.

The population is forecast to reach 32,427 by 2017 and 45,000 by 2031. One of the defining characteristics of the Surf Coast Shire is the part time nature of much of the population, because of its appeal as a holiday destination. More than 47 per cent of home owners are not permanent residents. The peak overnight population in the summer of 2014 / 2015 was an estimated 85,000.

Surf Coast Shire has a larger than average population of the following age groups:

- Primary Schoolers
- Parents and Homebuilders (aged 35 to 49)
- Older workers and pre-retirees
- Empty nesters and retirees

There is a smaller proportion than average of:

- Tertiary independent
- Young workforce (18-34)

How this Strategy links to our Council Plan

Sitting above the Communications and Community Engagement Strategy is the Surf Coast Shire Council Plan 2013-2017.

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

Themes

Governance

We are committed to deliver a transparent, high performing and sustainable organisation that engages with the community and adopts robust risk management practices.

Communities

We actively engage with our diverse and growing communities to establish quality services, healthy and safe environments and long term community partnerships.

How decisions are made

This diagram shows how the decision making process works for larger scale activities which require a formal decision by the elected Council. Small scale operational decisions are dealt with on a daily basis by Council officers. For example a customer request to patch a pothole would be forwarded to the responsible work unit by customer service staff. The work unit then assesses the request and carries out the necessary work.

Formal decisions





Key challenges

The following key challenges have been identified during the research and engagement. These challenges are the starting point for the strategy's major initiatives and action plan.



How do we ensure people know what Council is doing?

- Ensuring people know about all the good things Council is doing in their community, not just the controversial topics.
- Improving reputation and addressing negative stereotypes.



How do we engage with communities?

- Providing opportunities for people to be involved in and influence Council decision making, without over engaging.
- Ensuring all segments within the Shire are reached and equally heard – in particular non-residents and the more remote communities.
- Moving away from pushing information to two-way interaction.



How can we support the community?

- Greater local determination on key issues. Develop and work from a shared strategic direction, rather than concentrating only on project based engagement.



How do we coordinate what we are doing?

- Working with all areas within the Council to develop a consistent and coordinated approach. Ensure staff and Councillors are aware of what is happening across the organisation to assist with the coordinated planning of community engagement.

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 six communications and community engagement outcomes:

- Community is better informed and aware of Council services and facilities.
- Community members feel involved and a valued part of key decision making in their area.
- Council is a key driver in advocating for local interests.
- Continuous improvement and innovation are evident in how we work.
- Coordinated and consistent approach to communications and community engagement.
- Improved communication and engagement skills in the organisation through education and training.





Major Initiatives

These are some of the major initiatives we think will create a significant impact on how we keep our community in the loop and in the conversation.



Identity

We will investigate how people perceive the Surf Coast Shire identity and make sure our communications and marketing material accurately reflects what we do and more importantly who we serve.



Video

We will introduce video to highlight our services and facilities, deliver more engaging content and provide timely updates on major Council decisions.



Community Planning Program

We will work with townships to prepare individual community plans that will support communities to plan for themselves.



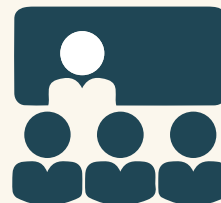
Website

We will thoroughly audit our existing web content and come up with ways to make it easier to find information and more relevant to users.



Community Panel

We will assemble a group of residents to regularly provide input on high level decisions so we continue to understand community priorities.



Staff Education

We will introduce an ongoing training program, backed up with new tools and templates, to help Council staff deliver best practice communications and community engagement activities. This will include an in-house plain English education campaign.



On-line Engagement Hub

All our current engagement activities will be consolidated into a web based hub to make it easier and more efficient for people to participate in decision making.



How we will achieve our objectives

Community is better informed and aware of Council services and activities

Highlights:



Introduce video to engage with our community about Council services, facilities and policies. This could include productions that highlight major projects or community services as well as short video segments published on social media to update the community on key Council activities. Video is an ideal medium to communicate many of the things Council does.



Undertake a review of the Surf Coast Shire Council website including content, structure and management model to improve the navigation, function and accessibility of website. The review will also consider web design for smart phone and tablet compatibility.



Build on the use of social media as a two way communication channel and consider how comments received via social media can inform Council decision making.



Undertake research and engagement on the Surf Coast Shire Council identity. In this context the identity is the combination of attributes that influences how the Council is perceived and understood within the community. Having a clear understanding of the identity will help us communicate and engage in a way that meets community expectations. This initiative is not intended to replace the existing corporate logo.

Measure:

- Number of views on YouTube
- Number of likes on Facebook and Twitter and analysis of reach and engagement
- Number of page views on website
- Comparison of results year to year in tailored survey of community perceptions
- Improved results in the areas of communication and community engagement in key strategic surveys including the DTPLI Satisfaction Survey, Surf Coast Shire Customer Service Charter and Council Plan.

Community members feel involved and a valued part of key decision making in their area.

Highlights:



Establish an ongoing community consultative group. This group will have representation from key demographic and geographic areas and provide input on top level strategic decision making. The aim would be to engage at a higher more strategic level rather than overload the group with engagement at operational level.



Review the Council's existing web-based engagement tool to ensure best value and to consolidate community engagement activities into an integrated on-line engagement hub hosted on the Surf Coast Shire website. The hub would be easy to find and easy to navigate and capture all current engagement activities.

Measure:

- Membership of consultative group represents demographics in the Shire
- Number of high level engagement activities referred to consultative group
- Qualitative assessment of committee input and strength of influence on key strategic decisions
- Numbers of page visits to on-line hub

Council is seen as a key driver in advocating for local interests.

Highlights:



Help individual communities to develop their own community plans. This initiative will support existing community groups to articulate their own township visions. The plans will provide ongoing guidance on Council decision making. This is a long term approach with much planning and design required.



Work with community groups and key government stakeholders, including departments and politicians, to define and advocate for Council funding priorities. Advocacy actions are described in Council's Strategic Advocacy Framework.

Measure:

- Plans developed for each identified community
- Annual increased percentage of township populations participating in developing community plans
- Improved results in the DTPLI Customer Satisfaction Survey in the area of advocacy
- Media coverage of successful advocacy campaigns

Continuous improvement and innovation are evident in how we work.

Highlights:



Provide timely updates of decisions made at Council meetings through social media, including the use of video.



Introduce a social media content strategy and calendar to understand diverse audiences and tailor social media to meet their needs.



Monitor best practice in the fields of communications and community engagement

Measure:

- Numbers of post and page likes on Facebook and Twitter and analysis of reach and engagement
- Improved results in the areas of communication and community engagement in key strategic surveys including the DTPLI Satisfaction Survey, Surf Coast Shire Customer Service Charter and Council Plan
- Recognition within the local government sector, measured through enquiries from VLGA, MAV and other peak bodies

Coordinated and consistent approach to communications and community engagement.

Highlights:



Collate information about upcoming communications and community engagement activities to identify opportunities for sharing of effort and information. The online engagement hub will be a key tool in delivering this initiative.



Create a corporate toolkit to assist in the delivery of communications and community engagement activities from all parts of the organisation.

Measure:

- Number of Communications and Community Engagement plans developed for key projects
- Improved results in the areas of communication and community engagement in key strategic surveys
- Qualitative assessment of engagement activities at "Involve" or greater on IAP2 spectrum

Improved skills in the organisation through education and training.

Highlights:



We will include Communications and Community Engagement in the staff induction program backed up by an ongoing training program.



An on-line hub on the Council's internal website will contain information and resources to support all staff involved in communications or community engagement activities.

Measure:

- Percentage of new staff inducted
- Improved results in the areas of communication and community engagement in key strategic surveys including the DTPLI Satisfaction Survey, Surf Coast Shire Customer Service Charter and Council Plan

References

- Council Plan 2013-2017 (Surf Coast Shire)
- Community Engagement Framework 2010 (Surf Coast Shire Council)
- Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey 2014 (DTPLI)
- Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-2017 (Surf Coast Shire Council)
- Strategic Advocacy Framework 2014 (Surf Coast Shire Council)

Review of other materials

Community Engagement

Participatory Budgeting – 10 year Financial Plan; City of Melbourne

Participatory Budgeting – Annual Infrastructure Fund; City of Darebin

‘Big Ideas’ community visioning for the development of the Council Plan; Shire of Hepburn

Online Consultation Hub and Residents ePanel; Wyong Shire Council

Integrated Community Engagement Plan for Urban Renewal Project; City of Fremantle

Citizen Engagement Advisory Committee; City of Ryde

Citizen's Jury – Vibrant and Safe Adelaide Nightlife; South Australian Government

Development of Community Engagement Culture within Council; Auckland City Council

Communications

‘Let’s Talk’ Corporate Communications Strategy 2011-2014; Stevenage Borough Council, United Kingdom

On-line News Hubs; Brimbank and Bass Coast Councils Victoria; Birmingham United Kingdom and California San Marcos State University United States

Plain English Guides / Government Digital Service Content Style Guide; Gov.UK

A Social Media Production Toolkit; through MAV training sessions

Marketing Management Strategy 2012-2014; City of Greater Geelong