COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

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Introduction

Council's Communication and Engagement Framework ("The Framework") outlines how we communicate and engage with the community, as well as the key initiatives and actions that we will take to improve communication and engagement between Council, stakeholders and the community.

We aim to build upon our current communication and engagement methods and activities ensuring consistent messaging across all platforms to reach a greater percentage of the community, to increase their knowledge of Council's activities and decisions, the outcomes of those decisions and how they can be involved.

The Framework has been developed to:

- Continue to improve the flow of information between Council and the community;
- Further increase transparency and provide opportunity for two-way communication;
- Ensure that all Council communications are timely and easily understood by all of our stakeholders;
- Ensure Council's communication and engagement activities meet the requirements set out in the *Local Government Act 1993;* and
- Consistently reflect Council's Purpose, Vision, Values and Objectives as outlined and adopted in Council's *Strategic Plan 2020-2029*

Council's *Strategic Plan 2020-2029,* focuses on Council's role in delivering the community's vision for the Glamorgan Spring Bay Municipality. This Framework is fundamentally linked to the objectives of the Strategic Plan, in particular objective six 'Draw on the knowledge and expertise of local people and communities in shaping and delivering our initiatives and plans - listening to and taking account of ideas and feedback from residents, businesses and ratepayers.'. Further to this, the development of a Communications and Engagement Framework was identified as an action in the *Annual Plan 2021-2022.*

Council are committed to the process of transparently sharing information and recognise the benefits that effective communication and engagement has for building the community's confidence in Council.

Effective communication and engagement requires input from all stakeholders. Both Council Staff and Councillors are responsible for the organisation's reputation. Everything we say and do impacts on the public's perception of Council. It is intended to undertake ongoing review of the effectiveness of communication activities implemented.

Community Engagement Overview

Community Engagement is defined as a process whereby Council and the community exchange information and ideas. Engagement is focused on group shared roles and responsibilities, not personal interactions. Effective engagement should influence and inform decisions of Council and the community.

When effectively delivered, community engagement can lead to better outcomes for all with the following benefits:

To the Community

- Improved community participation in Council's decisions.

- Better informed and resourced community with improved understanding of Council's policies, projects and decisions and actions.

- Enhanced feeling of inclusion and reduced feeling of real or perceived alienation and marginalisation, including the disenchantment associated with it. Even those whose opinions are not accepted have expressed their right to be heard and informed about the basis of the decision.

- Improved levels of satisfaction and ownership of problems and solutions.

- Appreciation of local knowledge systems and expertise.

- Empowerment for social change.

To the Council

- Better quality decisions informed by an understanding of community values, needs and aspirations.

- Help plan and prioritise services to meet community expectation, including efficient use of resources.

- Provides opportunity to help the community understand issues, alternatives, opportunities and solutions.

- Builds positive image and confidence in Council's ability to deliver on services.

- Gains early buy in and strengthens trust and partnership.

- Proactive treatment of unforeseen issues and problems.

Context

Key Communication and Engagement Objectives

The Framework will support our Vision, Guiding Principles and Key Foundations of Glamorgan Spring Bay Council, specifically:

Guiding Principle:

Draw on the knowledge and expertise of local people and communities in shaping and delivering our initiatives and plans – listening to and taking account of ideas and feedback from residents, businesses and ratepayers.

Key Foundation:

Cohesive, inclusive and resilient communities.

What we plan to do:

Create an informed and involved community by developing relevant and accessible communication channels.

Council recognises that there is scope to build upon current community understanding of what Council does, Council's activities, how community feedback and interest is taken into account during decision making, as well as how Council advocates on behalf of the community.

The key objectives of The Framework are to:

1. Continue to assess the different communication needs of our community and apply appropriate engagement methodologies for the range of communication opportunities.
2. Increase the community's knowledge and understanding about Council decisions, policies, activities and services.
3. Make the most effective use of appropriate media and technologies.
4. Ensure that internal communication is effective.
5. Consult and engage regularly, and in a timely manner, with the community.
6. Promote Glamorgan Spring Bay Council and its activities in an articulate and consistent way.
7. Make it easy for people to find out about the Glamorgan Spring Bay Municipality.
8. Ensure what Council says about itself is consistent with the customer experience of Council.
9. Improve the way we communicate the outcomes of our projects, programs, activities and decisions.
10. Commit to detailing and communicating how community feedback influenced Council's plans, actions and advocacy.

Principles That Guide the Way We Communicate and Engage

The Framework has been developed based on the following guiding principles for effective communication and engagement:

1. Prioritise communication and engagement that is proactive, positive, consistent and transparent.
2. Provide supporting information to assist stakeholders to make informed opinions.
3. Be inclusive and accessible to all members of the community.
4. Ensure that the broader views of the community are considered in the planning and decision making processes.

Communications and Engagement Framework

The Communications and Engagement Framework outlines our approach to engaging with the community and stakeholders. It provides transparency and clarity for all stakeholders so they can understand their role in the decision-making process. The Framework outlines why, who and how we will engage on plans and policies, it also then identifies how we will evaluate and report. The level of community involvement varies depending on the project and the potential impact of the decision.

Why we communicate and engage?

Council recognises the right of the community to be informed and have input into decisions which affect their lives. We value effective engagement in developing a positive relationship with our community, and acknowledges that in doing so, this will lead to better decision-making. We seek to take account of the views, needs, issues and aspirations expressed by the community and to balance these with other influences, such as budgetary and legislative constraints, to make informed decisions

Who we communicate and engage with?

The key stakeholders Glamorgan Spring Bay Council regularly communicates and engages with include:

- Residents and rate payers;
- Local businesses;
- Community groups including but not limited to 'Friends of' groups; Groups representing localities within the municipality and Special Interest groups;
- Visitors and tourists;
- Councillors;
- Politicians, both Federal and State;
- Agencies such as Federal and State Government departments, industry groups including Chambers of Commerce and not-for-profit groups; and
- Regulatory and peak bodies such as auditors, Local Government Association (LGAT), Local Government Division, Southern Tasmanian Councils Authority, Environmental Protection Authority etc.
- Partnership Engagement: Municipal, regional and state based stakeholders for inter-agency outcomes

These groups are unique and have different interests in Council functions and activities. Therefore, our communication and engagement approach with these groups needs to suit their differing requirements, whilst also being consistent with Council's objectives. Partnership Engagement also provides two way communication where the municipalities interests are communicated to wider interests and the impacts from wider interests are made known for communication into community.

How We Communicate and Engage

The IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) Spectrum (www.iap2.org.au) shows that differing levels of participation are legitimate depending on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

Public Participation Goal	Promise to the Public	Examples
Inform	Provide Information to the Community	Fact Sheets Website
Consult	Obtain community input	Focus Groups Surveys
Involve	Work directly with the community throughout the process	Workshops
Collaborate	Create partnerships with groups within the community to be involved on an ongoing basis	Resident Advisory Committees
Empowerment	To place final decision making in the hands of the community	Ballots Elector Polls

Council provides a range of ways for the community and stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process, these are outlined in the following table

Participation	Channel	In Practice
Inform	Website and social media	Provide information via Facebook and the Council's website.
	Advertisements, signs, letters and notices	A letter, sign, advertisement or notice may: • invite the community to participate in engagement • describe the matter, project or issue • outline how people can find out more information • advise how to make a comment or be involved • outline the timeframe for consultation.
	Council Office	Information is made available during exhibition the Council Office.
	Newsletters and publications	Information will be made available through community newsletters and publications such as, SeaSpeak, East Coast View and The Mercury and Examiner Newspapers.
Consult and involve	Community Connect meetings	Informal community meetings held in locations around the Municipality. An opportunity for residents to engage with the Mayor, Councillors and Council Management Team on local issues of concern in an informal setting
	Council meetings	All Council decisions are made at the monthly meeting, and these are open to the public to attend, with meetings agendas available four days beforehand. Agendas contain extensive reporting on Council activities, projects and programs.
	Public exhibitions and submissions	The exhibition process seeks written community and stakeholder feedback on a plan, policy or project.
	Surveys	Using market research software for telephone, online, and offline surveys optimised for mobile phones and language translations.
	Drop-in sessions and pop up stalls	Provide a face to face opportunity for the community to attend a drop- in session or a pop up stall often held as part of a wider event to gather information and provide feedback on an issue or project/policy related decision.
Collaborate and empower	Section 24 Special Committees of Council	These committees are made up of various members of our community and Councillors who advise the Council on views, needs, and interests in the local area. Committee members are selected because of their experience or skill in the area relating to that committee interest.
	Community and stakeholder reference groups	Groups of community and stakeholders that meet with staff, Councillors, or others to work through an issue, determine a decision for a project, policy or plan and provide advice on the decision.

Evaluation

Feedback mechanisms will be incorporated into communication and engagement activities to track and measure how effective they have been. The Engagement Evaluation Template is to be used for engagement activities.

Other evaluation mechanisms include:

- Website/social media analytics
- Surveys
- Meeting/email feedback
- Customer Service feedback

Evaluation will focus on consistency of message, levels of awareness, understanding and commitment of stakeholders, pockets of confusion and frequency. Stakeholder engagement activities and messages will be updated based on evaluation and feedback results

Evaluating and debriefing your engagement activity

Evaluation may be carried out during the implementation phase to see if the engagement activities are delivering the right information or attracting the right stakeholders; as well as at the end of the process to see what could be done differently.

Evaluation and debriefing an engagement activity is important for staff development and training; and to work through any difficulties raised.

Report

The most important part of any community engagement activity is demonstrating to participants that their views have been heard and that their time and input is valued.

A process must be established and identified within the engagement framework and plan. The community should be advised upfront so participants can understand how their information will be used throughout the project. The process used will depend on the depth of engagement you are conducting.

It does not mean that every sentiment or statement collected from the community can be implemented; there may be conflicting opinions in the community, or the subject may require more research. Rather it is a promise that a participant's time and contribution will be considered and respected.

Feedback to the participants can be in the form of a community engagement summary (synthesised findings) or a write up (verbatim) of the community's comments. It can be used as a way of keeping up the momentum of a project, while the project moves through Council's process (e.g. interim to a Council report).

The outcomes of how their contribution has affected decisions will also be communicated. Closing the loop is essential in building trust and transparency in the decision-making process

The Action Plan

The Framework will be resourced under existing budget allocations wherever possible. Any identified programs and projects which require funding will be subject to approval in Council's Annual Plan and Budget.

OBJECTIVES	ACTIONS
1. Continue to assess the different communication needs of community.	**Key Stakeholder Interviews** Meet with key stakeholder groups to gain a deeper understanding of communication and engagement issues and seek effective solutions for them. **Analyse the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Data** See what people are contacting Council about and how we can address this at a communication and engagement level.
2. To increase the community's knowledge and understanding about Council decisions, policies, activities and services.	**Current Projects Tab** Include a 'Current Projects' tab (or similar) on the website that is visible and regularly updated to ensure the most up to date information, with photos included where appropriate, is available. **Have Your Say** Develop a 'Have Your Say' section on the website. This could include details of what community members are currently being asked to comment on, surveys and polls, upcoming community connect sessions, Council Meeting dates, Special Meeting dates and a link to the feedback form. **Promote the Ways People Can Get Involved with Council** Regularly promote the ways residents can become involved with Council via the website, social media channels and East Coast View advert. **Promote Councils Lobbying Efforts Better** Develop media releases and social media posts that demonstrate and promotes Council's advocacy activities and priorities.
3. To make the most effective use of appropriate media and technologies.	**Online Accessibility** Work towards implementing online communication materials that meet accessibility requirements for residents of all abilities. **Social Media Trends** Keep up to date with the current trends in social media to ensure we are communicating via the channels our community is most engaged with. **Emails** Trial using an email provider such as Mail Chimp to communicate Council works updates, Council decisions and Have Your Say items.

4.	To ensure that internal communication is effective.	**Intranet Review and Refresh** Undertake a review of the Intranet and implement identified actions from the staff survey to ensure the Intranet becomes the core hub for internal communication. Actions to implement include: • A live Corporate Calendar • A Council Noticeboard • HR Updates • Council's social media pages posts • Events Calendar • Link to job vacancies on website • Staff contact listing and seating chart • General Managers Updates • Current Council Works and Projects
5.	To consult and engage regularly with the community.	**Have Your Say** Develop a Have Your Say section on the website. This could include details of what community members are currently being asked to comment on, surveys and polls, upcoming community conversation sessions, Council Meeting dates, Special Meeting dates and a link to the feedback form. **Promote the Ways People Can Get Involved with Council** Regularly promote the ways residents can become involved with Council via the website, social media channels and East Coast View advert. **Review the Structure of Community Connect Sessions** Review the structure of these meetings to ensure they are meeting the needs of Council and the community. **Project Management Plans** Review the 'Stakeholder Engagement' sections of the Project Management Plan templates to ensure they meet the requirements of the community.
6.	To promote Glamorgan Spring Bay Council and its activities in an articulate and consistent way.	**Branding Audit** Complete an audit of Council's branding to ensure consistency in its use across the Municipality. **Style Guide** Create a Council Style Guide to provide guidelines for the way all Council branded documents and publications should be presented from both a graphic and language perspective.
7.	To make it easy for people to find out about the Glamorgan Spring Bay Municipality.	**Website Review** Undertake a review of Council's public website. Investigate an upgrade to make it more user friendly and easier for people to find the information and/or documentation they need (subject to budget and/or resourcing approval). Ensure all information is presented in an articulate and consistent way in line with Council's objectives and key messages. Actions include: • Create a *Current Projects* tab • Create a *Have Your Say* tab • Tourist Information tab

8.	Ensure what Council says about itself is consistent with the customer experience of Council.	**Customer Service Charter** Refresh all staff on the standards outlined in the Customer Service Charter. **Customer Service Survey** Analyse the data from the Customer Service Survey to find out how we are going and areas for improvement. **Councillor Feedback** Periodically ask Councillors what feedback they are receiving about Council.
9.	To improve the way we communicate the outcomes of our programs and activities.	**Go One Step Further** When communicating the outcomes of Council projects, programs and decisions make the outcomes for the community clear, relatable, measurable and in plain English, including before and after photos where appropriate.
10.	A commitment to detailing and communicating how community feedback influenced Council's plans, actions and advocacy.	**Community Conversations Report** Report yearly on the issues and themes identified at Council's Community Connect meetings and Council's response and actions taken to address them. **Community Consultation Feedback** Following community consultation Council will report back to the community and provide clear feedback on how their input influenced the plan/strategy/decision.