Murrumbidgee
COUNCIL

Communication Strategy

	Name	Position	Signature	Date
Responsible Officer	**Alison Coe**	**Assistant General Manager – Corporate and Community Services**		31/10/19
Authorised By	**Craig Moffitt**	**General Manager**		

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Communication Strategy

Communication Principles

Communicating effectively is an important element of Council operations. Ensuring that the right messages get to those who need to hear it within a timely fashion is a key component of any Communications Strategy. As such, the following principles will apply to all Murrumbidgee Council communications:

- Our communication is planned and pro-active
- Our messages are clear, concise and easy to understand
- We provide our community with an opportunity to express their views and have input into our strategies
- Our internal communications are open and engender trust amongst employees
- We maximise communication effectiveness by using the most appropriate communication channel
- We evaluate the effectiveness of our internal and external communications on an ongoing basis

Key Messages
When Council communicates to the public it is to cover any one of three areas:

- ✓ We are taking a role of leadership (and letting you know what we're going to do about a certain situation)
- ✓ Meeting our commitments (we said we would do this and now we're reporting back to you)
- ✓ We are inviting you, the community to participate in some way

Community and Stakeholder involvement is essential to achieving the outcome of a better informed community, a staff which is actively involved in the change process and two-way communication which is enhanced and encouraged.

External

- Our focus is providing residents with real value for money.
- We will build community partnerships to deliver the best possible outcomes
- What Murrumbidgee Council does today shapes our community's long term future
- We listen to our community – they have a real role to play in shaping their local government
- We rely on our community to help us focus on what is important to ensure we do first things first.

Internal

- All Murrumbidgee Council employees are valued, respected and accountable for their performance.
- We are committed to listening, learning and responding to staff
- Council leaders are visible and accessible.
- Conversations with staff are a priority
- We encourage, acknowledge and celebrate success
- We place a high value on trust in the organisation

Key Stakeholders

To assist in determining which method of communication is best implemented, it is important to take the following steps:

- ✓ Identify all groups and individuals who may be affected by this change
- ✓ Assess the level of impact this change will have on each group and individual
- ✓ Develop/select a two-way communication process
- ✓ A consultation process has been included
- ✓ Determine the key messages that need to be delivered and how they will be delivered

It is important to remember that not all methods of communication will effectively get the right message to the right people, which is why it is often preferable to utilise a number of mechanisms.

Consultation with the Community

The level of community consultation should correspond to the potential level of community impact or concern, and should be tailored to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or policy.

Community consultation may range from
1. Exchange of discreet information between individuals or stakeholders.
2. Dissemination of information across the wider community
3. Obtaining general community feedback and information
4. Interrogating, engaging or partnering the community.

These levels of consultation form a spectrum of community involvement from providing information through to actively involving the community in Murrumbidgee Council's decision-making.

Consultation with Staff

Consultation is the best means of getting staff on-board with the change. This will allow them the opportunity to understand the new vision of the Council and where it is going, and it will allow staff to have their say.

To ensure consultation is effective, all staff that will be affected by the change will be provided with an explanation of the proposed change and provided with a copy of the issues paper (once it has been agreed to by Manex).

Consultation can take place with an individual staff member, or group of staff and, where they so choose, representative(s). Depending on the circumstances of each case a range of methods of consultation may be pursued, such as:

> ➢ Forming a Working Party to examine the proposed changes and make recommendations on them, especially where staff may not have been involved in the initial planning phase. Where a working party is formed, a timetable for its discussions will be provided
> ➢ Personal meetings with possibly affected staff, and, where they so choose, their representatives

Communication Planning

Good communication is not an accident. There are seven universal truths which underpin good communication. These are the guiding principles against which our communications will be evaluated:

1. Communication must, in general, be *planned*,
2. Opportunistic media should focus on social media platforms eg. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and utilise images, videos etc at local events.
3. Messages should be *clear* and *concise* – which means short catchy posts with links back to Council's website.
4. Communication is a *two-way* responsibility – this allows for Council to not only get the message out but receive ongoing input from the community to provide feedback.
5. There must be opportunity for *feedback*,
6. Communication must be *open* and *transparent*,
7. Channels of communication must be *appropriate* to the recipient(s) – to this end, Council will ask the community how it wishes to receive regular and ad hoc information.
8. Communication needs to be *monitored* and *evaluated*.
9. Over-communication is preferable to under-communication and repeat messages are acceptable.

Communications Plan Overview

Purpose	Reasoning	Process & Responsibilities
Media Relations/Publicity	- Media engagement is planned wherever possible - Acknowledge the value of the media as a means of communicating with our key stakeholders - Strengthen our relationship with the media, dealing with them in an open, honest and pro-active manner - Deliver clear, consistent messages to our stakeholders - Ensure both Murrumbidgee Council and media representatives have a clear understanding of appropriate communication channels and procedures - Provide a briefing sheet with background and key points	- Mayor and General Manager actively work on building strong, professional and effective relationship with media at all levels, including newspapers, television and radio - think first, "Would people want to know about this? Should people know about this?" - Media releases are distributed on a regular basis, highlighting achievements of council – Releases should be sent when the answer to the questions above is "yes" - Staff responsible for communication to pro-actively identify positive publicity opportunities and prompt work units and Manex - The General Manager and Mayor are well briefed to be Council spokespeople on issues - Media database covers all mediums and is continually updated
Community Engagement	- Ensure statutory obligations are met - Ensure those affected by Council decision have the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process - Ensure community is provided with the information it requires to participate in a meaningful way	- Know the project - Map the stakeholders - Define the issues - Find the right type of engagement to fit the project/issue/event – ensure activity is time & venue appropriate for target audience. - Develop a community engagement plan

Communications Plan Overview

Purpose	Reasoning	Process & Responsibilities
Internal Communications	• Ensure staff are well-informed about the changes in their workplace • Encourage the use of clear, concise and easy to understand language throughout the organisation • Build understanding, commitment and loyalty among staff • A common sense of purpose is engendered through keeping people informed	• New Council documents are written in clear, easy to understand language. Training is provided where appropriate • Ensure all staff are able to hear about their workplace in their workplace before they read it in the newspaper or on social media • Put communications and key messages on Manex agenda – this will ensure that decisions made at a Manex level are appropriately communicated to staff. • Work with Manex to actively identify successes and acknowledgements • Ensure key messages are communicated throughout the organisation • Expand Intranet for effective use as an internal communications tool • Deliver better communication results for outdoor staff. For example, attaching important internal emails to payslips, key messages information sheets to be read at weekly toolbox talks. Alternatively, develop and SMS system to advise all staff when critical communication has been issued and/or place printed information in work vehicles, staff pigeon-holes, notice boards, sign-on points.

Communications Plan Overview

Purpose	Reasoning	Process & Responsibilities
Community Engagement	• Ensure statutory obligations are met • Ensure those affected by Council decision have the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process • Ensure community is provided with the information it requires to participate in a meaningful way	• Know the project • Map the stakeholders • Define the issues • Find the right type of engagement to fit the project/issue/event – ensure activity is time & venue appropriate for target audience. • Develop a community engagement plan
Website	• Ensure Council's website reflects the organisation and provides regularly updated information • Ensure Council's website has update contact details	• Designate clear areas of responsibility regarding technical and visual aspects of website administration • Develop overall visual design of website homepage • Prepare website style guidelines • Incorporate linkages to Council's social networking/engagement tools
Social Media	• Media engagement is planned wherever possible • Deliver clear, consistent messages to our stakeholders • Provides a forum for engaging the community in on relevant issues • Increase access to information external to Murrumbidgee Council.	• Staff responsible for communication to pro-actively identify positive publicity opportunities and prompt work units and Manex • Links to media releases are distributed on a regular basis. • Promote positive outcomes for the community

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Communications Plan Overview

Purpose	Reasoning	Process & Responsibilities
Advertising	• Inform community about Council's decisions, events and operations • Invite public engagement on relevant issues • Use advertising to broaden the appeal of Council's brand • Ensure all advertising adheres to Council's corporate branding standards	• Ensure all advertising conforms to Council's consistent style and standards • Encourage the use of clear, easy-to-understand language where possible. Edit unwieldy language where appropriate • Seek advertising opportunities for Council that offer strategic value • Utilise online methods i.e., webpage, Facebook to promote Council activities

How Murrumbidgee Council will communicate

Please note – Murrumbidgee Council's delegated media spokespersons are the Mayor and General Manager

Method- (what channel will Council use?)	When will this be employed?	Why will this method be used?	Who will be the audience?
Council meetings	Monthly	To provide consistent, approved content to the public	Internal & External
Annual Report	Annually	It is a statutory requirement and it is an effective method by which Council summarises its activities for the year	Internal & External
Council/Community Strategic Plan	4-yearly with annual review	Statutory requirement	Internal & External
Website – also Home Page Feature and Home Page Introduction	Ongoing	This method is a contemporary and effective method of communication that will become more popular as the NBN is rolled out.	Internal & External
Surveys and evaluations	As required	Provides a means for anonymous contributions	Internal & External
Customer Service – counter enquiries and phone calls	Daily	An essential (mandatory) method by which Council interacts with its community and key stakeholders	Internal & External
Letters	As required	To be used for specific project based activities eg., roadworks, capital programs, events	Internal & External
E-mail direct to stakeholders	As required	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	Internal & External

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Method- (what channel will Council use?)	When will this be employed?	Why will this method be used?	Who will be the audience?
Phone	Ongoing	When information is needed in a short space of time and a two way conversation will assist in progressing the matter	Internal & External
Public Exhibition of documents	As required	Statutory requirement	Internal & External
Customer Service Centre foyers for displays/posters/brochures	As required	For community events and non – serious matters	Internal & External
What's On	Ongoing		Internal & External
Fact sheets for media, councillor and staff briefings developed into handouts for resident meetings	As required	To get across an important message and remove ambiguity "Council is in control of the content"	Internal & External
Statement of Vision and Priorities	Adopted 27 April, 2017	To create a united direction for the Council and generate community cohesion through a shared vision	Internal & External
Using the signature panel on Council emails to promote a matter/event	As required	Cost effective and has the potential to reach a large audience	Internal & External

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EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Method- (what channel will Council use?)	When will this be employed?	Why will this method be used?	Who will be the audience?
Direct contact between Council and residents/business etc	As required	It is an effective method of communication which can be adapted for the situation. Often this method provides written confirmation of agreed actions or commitments.	External
Rate notice and booklet	Quarterly	Statutory requirement	External
Public meetings/forums/events	As required	This method allows effective face to face forums and active listening	External
Media releases	As required	To reach a broader cross section of the community	External
Responding to media requests	As required	To facilitate Council's ability to state a position on a matter that the media are pursuing	External
Community newsletter	Monthly	Cost effective and reaches a large audience	External
Staff carrying out their jobs and being "observed" by the community	Daily	This method has the ability to create confidence in the community's understanding of work our staff do and also to undermine the confidence that the community may have in staff	External
Mail outs	As required	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis eg., Levee Bank project	External
School newsletters	As required	For community events and non – serious matters	External
Advertisements	As required	Statutory requirement	External
Display area, posters, brochures	As required	For community events and non – serious matters	External
Debtor accounts – include message/flyer	As required	To create public awareness of a change in policy or promotion of events	External
Community Information Register	To be developed	An opportunity to create a flow of information and allow input into Council planning and implementation processes	External
Direct letters from Council database	As required	Cost effective and reaches a large audience	External
State and Federal member communication	As soon as possible	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	External

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INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Method- (what channel will Council use?)	When will this be employed?	Why will this method be used?	Who will be the audience?
Staff meetings	TBC	To provide important and sometimes complex information in an arena that allows for the free flow of information to and from the organisation	Internal
Toolbox Talks	Weekly/6 weekly	To provide important and sometimes complex information in an arena that allows for the free flow of information to and from the organisation	Internal
Department meetings	TBC	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	Internal
Face-to-face with staff	As required/ongoing	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	Internal
Regular **ALL OF** staff gatherings	As required	To provide important and sometimes complex information in an arena that allows for the free flow of information to and from the organisation	Internal
Consultative Committee	Bi-monthly	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	Internal
Staff Bulletin	Weekly/fortnightly	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	Internal
Direct messaging to staff	As required	To provide important and sometimes complex information on a regular basis	Internal

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Potential Risks

- Opposition from residents of former Shires eg. Residual feelings in relation to merger.

- Councillors/Staff not aware of requirements/permissions around media coverage and social media comments/posts.

- Opposition/negative comments from residents due to lack of relevant and timely information.

- Staff hear more rumour than fact and act as ill-informed transmitters throughout the community.

- Council viewed as an "alternative" to traditional media advertising/promotion.

Risk Management

Potential Risk	Mitigation options
Opposition from residents of former Shires eg. Residual feelings in relation to merger.	Strong promotional activities with focus on key benefits and aspirational messaging. Creative and innovative methods for communication – not just reliant upon traditional media. Develop relevant and engaging fact sheets and promotional materials. Maintain strong media relations. Targeted information for key stakeholders and interested parties by Councils.
Councillors/Staff not aware of requirements/permissions around media coverage and social media comments/posts.	Council and Staff to be kept abreast of current issues. This information will form the basis of Councils' stance on the matters. Education process undertaken to inform Councillors and Staff of media delegations within the organisation. Councillors and Staff to be informed of social media obligations.
Opposition/negative comments from residents due to lack of relevant and timely information.	Communication and engagement is planned early wherever possible. Relevant and engaging information is provided within Council's communication mechanisms, ie web site, community newsletter, Facebook etc.
Staff hear more rumour than fact and act as ill-informed transmitters throughout the community.	Clearly and widely communicate key Council messages. Implement the Internal Communications Action Plan.

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Council viewed as an "alternative" to traditional media advertising/promotion.	Set clear guidelines for what Council "promotes" on its official communications platforms.

Communication Evaluation

- Prepare a monthly publicity report analysing the positive, negative and neutral media coverage of Council. Report to highlight the key issues as identified by the community.

- Prepare monthly Social Media report to highlight top posts, visitor comments and engagement levels.

- Media monitoring to be undertaken internally and utilizing the Department of Premier and Cabinet clipping files (while available).

- Weekly/fortnightly review to be undertaken of Web Page content for accuracy and currency.

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