



TE KAUNIHERA Ā ROHE O
WHAKAAHURANGI
STRATFORD
DISTRICT COUNCIL



Communications & Engagement Strategy

20
24

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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:

- set clear goals and effective methods for how Council communicates with our community and how our community can engage with Council, particularly in relation to decision-making
- engage consistently and at the right level
- provide a framework 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:

- All our published documents, including newsletters, newspaper publications, website and social media content, council documents, presentations and advertisements used to deliver information to different audiences, including our residents, wider community, staff and external stakeholder groups
- All statements and comments issued to the media
- All face-to-face meetings, events, and telephone conversations where we are hosting or organising the activities
- Materials that are produced to help 'inform' residents and the community, which may be 'one-way' communication at times

By 'engagement', we mean:

- Activities that are specifically designed to find out the experiences and views of the community
- Using a variety of methods, tailored specifically to our target audience, and what is required and most appropriate for them. This will not be a one size fits all approach, and may include the use of engagement and consultation events, structured discussions (e.g. focus groups, interviews), surveys or advisory groups
- Relationships with statutory partners and local partnerships including the voluntary and community sector, elected members and opinion leaders
- 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
- formal engagement processes required by legislation, such as consultation on long term plans and other statutory documents.



Strategic context

Communication and engagement is required as part of a range of Council processes. The overarching strategic document for Council is our **Long Term Plan (LTP)** and subsequent annual plans. Our **Significance and Engagement Policy** is reviewed every LTP cycle and plays a key role in how we engage as part of the decision-making process. The Communications and Engagement Strategy is designed to provide the framework for the application of our Significance and Engagement Policy.

Legislation

The Local Government Act 2002 (the Act) is the primary act that drives engagement and communication 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.

This Strategy acknowledges that some processes are subject to legal regulations that dictate a minimum level of consultation. In these circumstances Council must full comply with the relevant areas of legislation.

Part 6 of the Act specifically relates to planning, decision-making and accountability:

- Section 76 AA Significance and Engagement Policy
- Section 78 Community Views in Relation to Decisions
- Section 81 Contributions to decision making processes by Māori
- Section 82 Principles of Consultation
- Section 83 Special Consultative Procedure

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

Public consultation is required in a number of other Acts, for example Land Transport Act 1993, Resource Management Act 1991, and New Zealand Public Health and Disabilities Act 2000. It also stems from other obligations such as those set out in Te Tiriti of Waitangi/the Treaty of Waitangi.

The management and release of information gathered during consultation is subject to the Privacy Act 2020 and the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987.



District profile

Council manages a wide range of services for the community, 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 aquatic centre.

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 Te Papakura o Taranaki.
- 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, Te Papakura o Taranaki and Whanganui National Park. We are a main gateway to Taranaki Mouna including popular tourist sites Te Rere o Kapuni (Dawson Falls), Stratford Mountain House and Manganui Ski Field. We are intersected by State Highway 3 and State Highway 43 (Forgotten World Highway) which connect Stratford township to our smaller towns including Midhirst, Toko and Whangamomona.

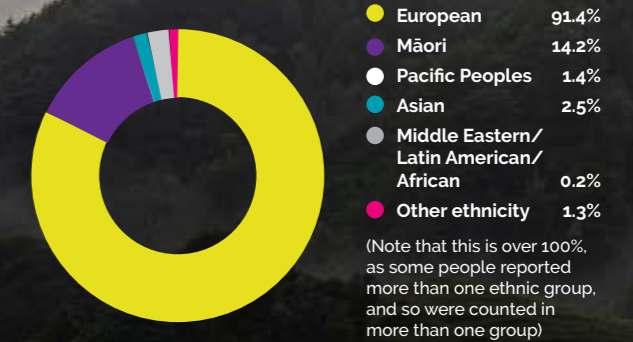
Within our district we have 10 primary schools and 2 secondary schools.



Our community

We have a population of 9,880 (2020 StatsNZ) 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 lives 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.

ETHNICITY



MEDIAN AGE

39.6 YEARS

IDENTIFY AS MĀORI

1,350

UNEMPLOYMENT

3.6%

MEDIAN AGE FOR MAORI

21.9 YEARS

GENDER

4,752 ♀

BIRTHPLACE

90.7%

4,722 ♂

9.3%

Our Vision

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

Our Principles

Inclusive

Council gives all community members a reasonable opportunity to contribute.



Proactive

Council prioritises sharing information as soon as it's available and involving community members in the decision-making process as early as possible, so they have the necessary time to learn about the issue and actively participate.



Coordinated

Council's approach to communication and engagement uses community and council resources (ie, staff time and budget) effectively



Accessible

Council designs communication and engagement processes that make it easier for community members to influence decisions



Effective

Council's communication and engagement processes are transparent, timely, easy to understand and regularly evaluated to identify continuous improvement opportunities.





Guiding principles for engagement with Māori

Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the basis that forms the overall strategic relationship between Māori³ and the Crown. Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and in particular, its principles, play a central role in shaping the engagement between Māori and Council. For example, it's the principles of Te Tiriti that form the basis for Māori involvement with local government. To give effect to Te Tiriti, the courts, government, the Waitangi Tribunal, and many organisations have all developed principles or implicit requirements for both parties.

For Māori, the process of genuine engagement is:

- an acknowledgement of their rangatiratanga and status as Treaty partners
- an acknowledgement that mātauranga Māori makes an important contribution to solving policy and practical problems
- an acknowledgement that Māori have the resources and capability to contribute; and
- an acknowledgement that some issues affect Māori disproportionately who are therefore better placed to develop the solutions.

The term Māori is used here and refers to tangata whenua and or mana whenua that within the context of Stratford district means those hapū who whakapapa to the land. In terms of mana whenua, there are also a number of groups and entities that include: iwi, hapū, marae, and post-settlement governance entities.

Councils operate under a number of statutory rules that require them to either consult or engage with Māori or tangata whenua, and/or to provide opportunities for participation in some capacity. Underpinning all terms is the assumption that conversations should be occurring to understand and include the values, aspirations, and interests of Māori. Several pieces of legislation direct central and local government agencies to "take into account" or "have regard to" the principles of Te Tiriti.

Not all Māori engagement is driven by law. Māori have a wealth of knowledge about the cultural, natural, physical, and social environment and are key players in regional economic development.

There will be many occasions where input from Māori will inform and enrich the work of

Council. Aside from Te Tiriti and a legislative context, there are compelling reasons for local government and Māori to work together.

While Council aims to develop an internal Māori engagement framework for staff with iwi partners as part of this strategy, Te Arawhiti has already created a framework and guidance for public sector engagement with Māori that we can seek guidance from.

It identifies three key principles that should guide the development of an engagement process with Māori: **Engage early, Be inclusive, Think broadly.**

Te Arawhiti says engagement that is early, inclusive and broad will lead to the following:

- A greater understanding of one another's expectations and aspirations
- Increased opportunities to co-design processes and systems
- Increased opportunities to establish shared projects and programmes
- Improved process based on understanding of one another's priorities, expectations and available resources
- More efficient use of government and Māori resources
- Supporting Māori expectations and aspirations

If engagement with Māori isn't early, inclusive or broad, there may be reduced opportunities to develop meaningful partnerships and the development and implementation of effective policy options may be compromised.

Stratford District Council is on a journey to grow its relationships with Māori. Partnerships between local government and Māori across Aotearoa New Zealand is continually evolving, and SDC acknowledges the inequities experienced by Māori through historical engagement approaches by locally and across Aotearoa. It remains vital to maintain and foster both new and established relationships with Māori across the Stratford district – to ensure inclusiveness is embedded in all of Council's communication and engagement activity.

We acknowledge the following seven iwi, and their hapu as mana whenua within the Stratford District:

- Ngāti Ruanui
- Ngāti Maru
- Ngāti Tama
- Te Atiawa.
- Ngāruahine
- Ngāti Mutunga
- Ngā Rauru

Council also recognises the role of Whakaahurangi Marae within the district.



Core values for community engagement

Council believes that by encouraging open conversations on community challenges and opportunities we can improve our delivery of services and empower our community to participate in democracy.

Council acknowledges the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Core Values as the underlying principles for engaging with communities.

Public participation/community engagement:

- is based on the belief that those who are affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the
- decision-making process;
- includes the promise that the public's contribution will influence the decision;

- promotes sustainable decisions by recognising and communicating the needs and interests of all participants, including decision makers;
- seeks out and facilitates the involvement of those potentially affected by or interested in a decision;
- seeks input from participants in designing how they participate;
- provides participants with the information they need to participate in a meaningful way;
- communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.



Levels of engagement

The 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.	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure public concerns and aspirations are understood and considered prior to decision-making.	Partner with the public to develop an 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. <i>Under the LGA 2002, the Mayor and Councillors are elected to make decisions on behalf of their constituents.</i>
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 key stakeholders and community experts 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factsheet • Website • Social media • Public notices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal submissions and hearings • Focus groups • Online surveys 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Focus groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External working groups (involving community experts) • Co-design workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Binding referendum • Local body elections



Channels of communication

Communicating with our diverse community is important to ensure we have a well-informed district that has been provided the opportunity to engage with Council and have a say in the matters that affect them.

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 has available to meet these needs.

● 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/Hāpu/Marae	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲
	Contractors and suppliers	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	▲	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Consultants	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Other local authorities	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Government agencies	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
Members of parliament	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	

Roles and responsibilities for communications and engagement processes

For effective conversations and decision-making that best meets the needs of the whole community, we all need to work together. This means Council staff, elected members and community members all have a role to play in these processes.

Council staff

Staff are responsible for the design and implementation of communication and engagement processes. They will take the appropriate steps to ensure the process is consistent and transparent for everyone involved. These steps include:

- Define the project/context
- Define the purpose and identify negotiables (what elements of the project can be influenced) and non-negotiables (what cannot be influenced by the public)
- Identify the level of engagement required, guided by the Significance and Engagement Policy
- Identify who needs to be involved, and develop relationships
- Develop communication and engagement plan for approval
- Roll out the plan
- Give feedback to the community
- Evaluate and review the process
- Ensure ongoing monitoring
- Document evidence (record-keeping for requests under the Local Government Official Information and Meetings Act 1987)

Elected Members

As community leaders, the support of councillors is important for successful community engagement. Councillors will:

- support community engagement processes as appropriate (ie. community meetings and events)
- review information gathered through community engagement processes, existing research and information already known to Council, and seek clarification where necessary to inform Council decisions

- approach decision-making processes with an open mind and in the public's best interest
- act as a channel between the community and Council (using the appropriate information request tools ie. StratfordDC@stratford.govt.nz, online request form and phone 06 765 6099 to direct feedback or questions from the community to Council officers)

From the Council's Code of Conduct:

- treat all people fairly,
- treat all other members, staff, and members of the public, with respect,
- share with Council any information received that is pertinent to the ability of the local authority to properly perform its statutory duties,
- operate in a manner that recognises and respects the significance of the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi,

Community members

As part of engagement opportunities, community members are asked to:

- focus on the decision to be made/question to be answered
- recognise that Council must consider the needs of the whole community
- request alternative ways of participating as required
- listen, to best understand the views of others in the community
- provide input and feedback within timeframes
- encourage others to offer feedback, participate in engagement opportunities.

Our strategic goals

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.
OUTCOMES
Planned and effective communication and engagement processes for our community, resulting from a collaborative approach internally
Improved understanding of Council communications through plain language
Consistent culture of community engagement where staff are aware of and actively follow Council's policies and procedures in considering engagement as early as possible in the process.
Better informed and engaged community through consistent processes
Communications and engagement activity that meets legislative requirements.

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.
OUTCOMES
Council has a robust and up to date Community Directory through regular engagement
Provide the community with more open and informal opportunities to discuss issues and ideas with Council
Increased understanding of the decision making processes leading to engaged discussions where our community are influential in the process
All members of our community feel informed and engage with Council on services, event, initiatives and projects
Engagement processes are established between council, iwi and hapū

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.
OUTCOMES
Targeted communications based on community interest and needs
New and creative mediums for increased exposure to Council services, events, initiatives and projects through cost-effective options
Reach more people with information on Council services, events, initiatives and projects

Media relations

AIM
Deliver clear, consistent and factual information to the media to ensure comprehensive and accurate coverage of Council decisions and activities.
OUTCOMES
Reach more people with information on Council services, events, initiatives and projects
Better informed community through accessible information
Better informed community through consistent and accurate information sharing
Increased awareness of Council services, events, initiatives and projects

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.
OUTCOMES
Provide a modern, user-friendly website that is engaging and meets web accessibility standards
Increased community awareness and participation in Council owned digital platforms (ie, social media, Antenno)
Increased opportunities for community members to provide feedback and engage on issues via online platforms
Access to relevant information at the customers time-of-need

Visual communications

AIM
Ensure Council's online presence and printed publications strengthen our brand via creative, informative and engaging communications.
OUTCOMES
Consistent approach to Council produced publications
Consistent approach to signage throughout the district
Consistent, recognised and strengthened brand that promotes our unique identity
Consistent, recognised and strengthened brand that promotes our district and the people who live here

Future focused

AIM
Ensure Council's communication and engagement practices are regularly evaluated to identify continuous improvement opportunities.
OUTCOMES
Communications and engagement is fit for purpose - works for the audience.
People always have the opportunity to provide feedback on the communication and engagement processes they're involved in.
Evaluation methods are tailored to suit the level of engagement and process undertaken.
Trusted partnerships are built between Council and the communities they communicate and engage with.

Where to from here

Council officers will develop a work plan that supports this strategy. Progress on the work plan will be reported to elected members on a regular basis.

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

How will we work?

Everything we do will align with our principles:

- Inclusive
- Proactive
- Coordinated
- Accessible
- Effective

What will we need to do?

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

What will success look like?

- Consistent communication and engagement processes
- Better informed community
- People engaging with Council
- Recognised and strengthened identity
- Improved and sustained stakeholder relationships



Related Documents

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

**Stratford
District Council**

61-63 Miranda Street
Stratford

POST

PO Box 320
Stratford 4352

PHONE

(06) 765 6099
24 hours

stratford.govt.nz



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