

WDC Communications Strategy

Waimate 2020

BACKGROUND

One of the important developments from the exercise to create the Long Term Council Community Plan has been to throw into sharp relief the communication needs of the District Council in explaining what the Council does, why it does it, the outcomes the community expects, and the service levels and projects that the community wants to see in the next few years.

To ensure the success of the LTCCP, and to encourage the community to support it, communication of the details of the plan has been made available through a number of different types of common media available to the Council. These included several public meetings at different areas within the District to provide forums for public discussion, newspaper articles and inserts, hand-out summaries and special forums.

However, the Council staff has become aware that there are always opportunities to be more effective in achieving full consultation with the public about all the aspects of the plan that impact on various sectors of the community.

The same objectives can be extended to include all the information that the Council needs to deliver on a regular basis.

As a result, it was decided to prepare a Communications Strategy to look at ways of improving all communications.

After discussion with council staff, some members of the community, and attendance at public meetings, the following Communications Strategy was created which looks at enhancing Council communications activities to reach their target audiences more effectively.

The daily issues of Council business also require the development of communications strategies and tactics to ensure that the needs of the residents and ratepayers of the District are met efficiently and effectively.

THE CONTENTS OF THE COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The document includes the following sections:

- An outline of the Objectives, audiences, stakeholders and key points that make up the basis on which the Strategy has been developed.
- An overview of the Strategies, Tactics, and Tools and the Actions still required to be executed to bring the full Strategy into operation.
- An overview of how the success or otherwise of the communications will be monitored.
- How the strategy will cope with unusual events and major issues.
- A summary of the common information to be passed to the public and the methods to be used.
- A suuamry showing who to contact about specific issues or to obtain answers to your everyday questions.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this strategy are:

- To promote democratic consultation with the community on policy matters which affect the District.
- To inform the community about matters which affect their lives: fire bans etc.

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- To provide the community with information about regulations they need to observe.
- To make available forms and information to the Council and the Community to conform to required legislation on building etc.
- To give direction to the Community on how to gain information from the Council.

Audiences and stakeholders

A successful strategy recognises that different audiences may require different communication methods. The major audiences for the Waimate District Council include;

- The ratepayers and residents of the district
- Neighbouring district councils, specifically, Waitaki District, MacKenzie District and Timaru District
- Regional councils, specifically, Canterbury Regional (ECan) and Otago Regional
- Government agencies as listed in Volume 2 of the LTCCP as partnering organisations
- Business people in the District
- Farmers in the District
- Professional, social and cultural organisations within the District
- Local Tangata Whenua and regional Maori organisations
- External business concerns with interests or investment within the District

Key Points

There are key points which lie behind the strategies, tactics, tools and actions that this approach requires are as follows:

- The Long Term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) contains an outline of the

services that the Council provides for the Community.

- The outcomes, strategic objective, service levels and projects within the LTCCP come from consultation with the Community about how it wants the Waimate District to be as it develops into the future.
- The LTCCP is always a “work in progress” in that the community will be consulted on progress throughout the life of the plan and their submissions and responses will influence what is in the plan and what the Council will deliver over time.
- The plan will also be fully reviewed every three years so it becomes a ‘rolling’ plan looking always at least seven years into the future.
- The Council is there to provide necessary services to the Community – utilities, roads, lighting etc, at agreed service levels for which the householders of the Community are levied rates to cover the expenses of these services.
- The Council provides information about regulations that citizens must observe in going about their business in the community. For example, building codes and building inspections to ensure that buildings are safe.
- The Council provides many services to foster the well-being and growth of the community. These may change over time as the community expresses a general need or want for a new or augmented service.
- The Council provides a conduit for bi-lateral information between the community and governmental agencies.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The following have been identified as the key strategies;

- Develop a broad two-way communications programme targeted at all sectors of the district to ensure that community outcomes are fully considered and ensure an understanding of information from governmental sources.
- Develop, implement and maintain electronic information programmes, both internal and external, to ensure a broad capability for rapid and efficient communications.
- Work with interest groups within the community to promote consultation on Council activities.
- Develop and implement closer relationships with relevant media outlets in the wider region.
- Develop standardised communication methods and processes within the Council offices for internal and external communication.

Tactics and Tools

The Council will employ a variety of methods to ensure that communications operate effectively and efficiently.

These include;

- Make contact with special interest, cultural and professional groups within the District and develop an information sharing network. Institute a programme of regular speaking engagements using senior staff and elected representatives from the Council to outline new projects, explain new bylaws, and discuss the LTCCP. Encourage regular feedback from these groups on how the Council is progressing on the projects and activities in the LTCCP.
- Build a database of the lead contacts in the interest, cultural and professional groups in the District and keep it up-to-date. Maintain regular contact with these people by making sure they get copies of the Bulletin and other newsletters.
- Maintain the regular newspaper Bulletin and print a few copies to be left on the

counters of selected businesses in the District. Provide this via a local newspaper, regularly review and investigate other possible outlets within the Community.

- Maintain an informative and up-to-date Waimate District Council website for Council news and information. Delegate a staff member to be the Website Manager and other members of staff to gather and write information to be placed on the website.
- Develop, implement and maintain a parallel Waimate Information Services website with the ability to have a staff member update this regularly. Both websites should link seamlessly from one to the other.
- Develop closer relationships with the local and regional media by providing information, invitations to informal meetings with Council staff and elected members.
- Implement standardised documentation for external and internal communication through the development of document templates.
- Commission a new logo for the Waimate District Council and develop a new corporate identity. Prepare a Style Guide outlining fonts, colours and usage. Ensure that all sections of the District Council are aware of the style guidelines and that these are used in all forms of media from letterhead to website, LTCCP to information bulletins.
- Continue to develop the list of regular Council communications needs and responsibilities as defined in the table on Page 63.

Action Plan

The Council and the Information Services websites have been upgraded and updated and a program of expansion of content is continuing.

The database of Community groups and contacts will be enhanced as soon as possible. The public meetings on the LTCCP would be enhanced if these contacts could help with publicising them.

Informal meetings have been arranged with local media: press, radio and TV with a view to learning about their deadlines and their view of local government.

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The Council will:

- Develop a programme of speaking engagements for senior staff with local interest, cultural and professional groups.
- Develop and implement the use of templates for standardised Council communications.
- Continue to develop a staff training schedule that includes training in communications.
- Identify common and regular topics, and develop standardised approaches to answering public enquiries and complaints.

Existing resources include several databases of information relevant to daily Council business. These databases are being regularly monitored, developed and updated.

Evaluation

Evaluation of the Communications Plan and Actions should be carried out half yearly to see whether the strategies and actions are effective. How this evaluation is carried out will depend to some extent on whether a budget can be set aside for a comprehensive survey of the citizens of all areas within the district, or whether it is believed that informal discussions with the interest groups will give a clear picture of the perception that the citizens have of Council performance against the service levels as set down in the LTCCP.

The success of the websites can be easily assessed by regular reports from the hosting company on hits, visits and downloads from the website. Regular reporting is part of the service contract with the provider.

Ultimately, the citizens will be able to express their opinions about the Council's performance at election time and at the regular public meetings. One of the reasons for encouraging staff to speak at community groups is to gauge informally how the community is feeling about Council performance.

Issues Management

The rural communities of New Zealand often have to deal with a number of issues for which they have minimal resources. In the Waimate District, a recent example would be the

Project Aqua question.

The proposal of a large national company to build a large hydro electric scheme within the area (and neighbouring districts) caused more than a little consternation within the community at the impending impact on their communities and way of life. The resulting protests and written submissions against the project were a way of bringing the community together (by and large) and defining those aspects of living in the District that the community values.

Other issues that could arise within a rural community may include: closing a local school because of falling rolls, a shortage of medical facilities, the proposal to build a large factory within the district, population drift to the cities. All of these are issues which the district council must deal with in whatever way is best for the community. All of them bring communications needs with them.

A well established and Council wide communications strategy enables the council to deal more effectively with these issues as they arise.

Extreme emergencies which sometimes happen – floods, droughts, fires, epidemics of illness, etc, can be more efficiently handled if there are clear guidelines and priorities established before the emergency happens.

It is necessary to:

- Keep the website on line to post information and news as required;
- Maintain contacts at radio stations in Timaru to post news bulletins as required;
- Be aware of various possible communications links in different areas within the district, and maintain a contact network in the more remote areas of the District;
- Have Council spokespeople prepared to speak to the media on their area of expertise as required, - some media training should be provided;
- Develop a roster of vital staff which should include members of staff to keep the website updated, and prepare statements for the media as soon as the initial emergency is dealt with.

Some Common items of information to be distributed to the public and the usual methods to be employed

Type of Information	Audience	Staff Responsible	Methods
Part 1 - General News			
Council News, public affairs and Media interaction	General public News Media Other councils	Community Services Manager, CEO, Mayor	Council news in the form of media releases are sent to media via email and mail as appropriate. Other contact is by telephone on a regular basis with local newspapers and radio stations. In some cases, news will also be posted on the Council's website and in the 'NewsLine' regular newspaper information bulletin.
Advertising – Situations Vacant, Public Notices, etc	General public Media	Administration Officer CEO's Personal Assistant Corporate Services Personal Assistant	Advertisements are published in local newspapers and on the Council's website. Advertisements will also be placed in national newspapers for some vacant positions where the recruiting base is wide.
The 'NewsLine' regular newspaper information bulletin	General public News Media	Corporate Services Personal Assistant	The newsletter is published in two local newspapers on a monthly cycle. The content is also published on the Council's website. Content is forwarded to the 'Timaru Herald' via email and to the 'Waimate Advertiser' as hardcopy.
Civil Defence Emergencies	General public Media Regional CDEM Headquarters	Civil Defence Controllers WDC Mayor	Emergencies will be notified by news media, in particular, local radio stations, and by notices posted publically at the Local Government Centre. Key personnel will also be contacted by telephone or mobile phone if these are operational. Regional HQ will be contacted via the Civil Defence radio network.

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Type of Information	Audience	Staff Responsible	Methods
Electoral notices, Candidature applications and announcement of results	General public Media Candidates	Returning Officer	Application forms for potential candidates are available from the Local Government Centre by mail or in person. Candidature applications have to be submitted in person at the Local Government Centre where candidates are also provided with the Candidate's information pack. Election results are initially delivered by telephone to candidates by the Returning Officer and then posted on the Council's website and by a notice publically displayed at the Local Government Centre.
Status of Fire Bans and controls	General public Media	Asset Manager	Notification that controls or bans are in place or lifted will come by Fax to the Office Supervisor from the South Canterbury Rural Fire District in Timaru. Information will be placed on the Council website and public notices in local newspapers. Information will also be available from the Council's reception staff by telephone or in person.
Road Closures	General Public Transit NZ	Roading Engineer	Notices of road closures are placed in local newspapers. Objections can be lodged at the Council Offices by mail or in person in writing.
Part 2 - Council Services			
Library Catalogues for Books and other Media	General public Library interloan	Head Librarian	The Council's Library is developing an on-line catalogue of its loan stock. Access will be available to library members through the Internet. Access to the Catalogues is also available at the Library.
Rates Demands	Property owners Businesses	Rates Officer	Rates demand notices are sent to all ratepayers by mail.
Rates-based Information, Property details.	Property owners Businesses	Rates Officer and GIS Officer	Available by request, (mail, telephone and in person), and by a dedicated computer for public access located in the Local Government Centre's foyer. Certain information such as the name of the owner of a property is not generally available and access to this information is controlled by statute.

Type of Information	Audience	Staff Responsible	Methods
General District Information for Residents, Visitors and Tourists	General public Businesses Media Visitors Tourists Tour Operators	Information Services assistant	General District Information is distributed from the Council's Information Centre via mail or in person and by posting on the websites.
District Promotional Material, New Resident Packs	General Public New Residents Businesses	Community Services Manager	A Waimate brochure is produced biannually and is distributed by mail to all Information Centres nationwide. Copies are held in the Council's Info Centre and can be requested on-line via the website. New Resident packs are distributed by mail or in person in response to cards distributed to postmen and real estate agents for distributing to new residents.
Swimming Pool Season Dates	General Public	Parks and Reserves Manager	Opening and Closing dates are published in local newspapers. Details are also available by telephone or in person from the Council's Office and the Swimming Pool and from the Council's website.
Waitaki Lakes Camping Grounds Season Dates	General Public	Parks and Reserves Manager	Opening and Closing dates are published in local newspapers. Details are also available by telephone or in person from the Council's Office and the Information Centre and from the Council's website.
Complaints about Solid Waste collection	General public	Contractor via 0800-359-1221	All complaints about rubbish collection should be made directly to the Council's Solid Waste Contractor by the 24 hour/7 day telephone number. This is 0800-359-1221.
Part 3 - Planning and Regulatory Information			
Building permits, building inspections: General Information, Application Forms and notifications.	General public Property developer Businesses	Building Control Officers	General information and Application Forms can be obtained in person at the Planning and Regulatory offices in the Local Government Centre or requested via mail, telephone or the Council website. Applications are forwarded by mail or in person to the Planning and Regulatory offices. Notifications of consent are mailed to applicants or available when ready from the Council's offices.

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Type of Information	Audience	Staff Responsible	Methods
Land Information Memorandums, (LIMs): Requests for LIMs and receipt of completed Documents	General public Property developers Businesses	Planning & Regulatory assistant	
Property Information Memorandums, (PIMs): Requests for PIMs and receipt of completed Documents	General public Property developers Businesses	Planning & Regulatory assistant	
Resource consents: General Information, Application Forms and notifications.	General public Property developers Businesses Ministry for the Environment	Resource Planners	General information and Application Forms can be obtained in person at the Planning and Regulatory offices in the Local Government Centre or requested via mail, telephone or the Council website. Applications are forwarded by mail or in person to the Planning and Regulatory offices. Notifications of consent are mailed to applicants or available when ready from the Council's offices.
Part 4 - Council Operations			
Council Meeting Notices, Agendas, etc	Elected Representatives General Public News Media	Corporate Services Personal Assistant Administration Officer	Council meeting notices are advertised in local newspapers and on a schedule available at the Council Offices. Agendas are posted or emailed to Elected Members and the news media as appropriate and posted on the Council's website.

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Type of Information	Audience	Staff Responsible	Methods
Council Meeting Minutes	Elected Representatives General Public News Media	Corporate Services Personal Assistant Administration Officer	Minutes are archived into special minute books for long term storage. They are sent to elected members as inclusions in Agendas for later meetings. Copies are available by request from the Council Offices by mail or in person.
Long-term Council Community Plan (LTCCP) and Annual Plans	General Public Other Councils Government Agencies Audit NZ	CEO Policy Analyst	Updates to the LTCCP are advertised in local newspapers when available to the public. A summary of key points is sent to all households via the 'Waimate Advertiser', by mail drops and by mail to all landowners who live outside the District. Submissions are received by fax, mail or in person in writing at the Council's Offices. Submissions are published in the local newspaper. Staff reports on submissions are mailed to all submitters and the results of Council hearings are posted online and in local newspapers. Copies of the LTCCP are available online via the Council's website and from the Council Offices by mail or in person.
Annual Reports	General Public Other Councils Government Agencies Audit NZ	Corporate Services Manager	An advertisement is placed in local newspapers when the report is available to the public. Copies of the Annual Report are available online via the Council's website and from the Council Offices by mail or in person.
Consultation Requests	General Public	Policy Analyst	Consultation advertisements are placed in local newspapers and on the Council's website. The results of consultation are advertised in local newspapers and by mail to submitters.