

Northern Midlands Council Communications and Engagement Strategy 2022



Strategic context

This Communication & Engagement Strategy supports objectives in the Northern Midlands Strategic Plan 2021-2027. Effective communication is essential in the delivery of local government services and good governance.

Through strong and effective communication with our community, Council to:

- Keep all stakeholders, including our residents, councillors, staff, government agencies, non-government community organisations and businesses informed about our plans, policies and decisions
- Engage with residents to improve community awareness of our programs, activities and services
- Provide mechanisms for effective and timely feedback to encourage active participation and support of projects
- Actively promote the municipality widely in Tasmania and Australia as a place to live, invest in existing businesses and new projects, and visit.

Council's communication and engagement methods must be inclusive and accessible to all community members.

LEADERSHIP

Northern Midlands Council will engage and connect Councillors and the organisation with the community to maximise participation and increase community satisfaction.

Council wants its audiences to be informed and engaged to build trust and confidence, which will ultimately improve community satisfaction levels, as well as Council's reputation.

PROGRESSION

Northern Midlands will improve its standing in the community by:

- 1) development of an ongoing communication program to keep the community informed about its programs, services and decisions.
- 2) building its reputation and identity through consistent messaging and an engaging visual presence.
- 3) strengthening partnerships and community involvement through a whole of Council approach to engagement.
- 4) building the capacity of staff and councillors to communicate, engage and champion council business.

PEOPLE

Effective communication is essential in the delivery of local government services and good governance. Clear communication is essential when working with the community, councillors, staff, external agencies, government bodies and third parties interested in regional issues.

PLACE

Northern Midlands Council delivers a wide range of services to diverse communities across the municipality. Our aim is to enhance the sense of a common community interest across the municipality while also providing specific information relevant to each town, region or sector.

Strategic plan

The Strategic Plan 2021-2027 updates the Northern Midlands Strategic Plan 2017-2027.

The plan focusses on the unique elements of the Northern Midlands, an enviable place to live, work and play.

The Plan is based upon four key priorities:

1	Lead	Serve with honesty, integrity, innovation and pride
2	Progress	Economic health and wealth – grow and prosper
3	People	Cultural and society – a vibrant future that respects the past
4	Place	Nurture our heritage environment

Each priority is supported by four strategic outcomes that describe what Council aims to achieve, and that are consistent with its vision.

Actions and projects to achieve these outcomes will be included in Council's Annual Plan. Performance measures will be included in the Annual Plan to enable Council to track its progress against each of the strategic outcomes.

The Annual Report, which is presented at the Council's Annual General Meeting, will provide the update as to how the strategic outcomes have been achieved throughout the year.

Values

HONESTY

Treat all with honesty, respect and trust.

INTEGRITY

Listen, learn and proactively deliver Council's vision.

INNOVATION

Explore, expand and adapt to achieve a shared vision.

PRIDE

Serve community with pride and energy.



Strategic outcomes

As a Provider, Council ...

- 1.1 Commits to providing the latest information on projects, services, activities and decision making processes in a manner that is clear, easy to understand and accessible to all people through a range of channels including print media, radio, direct mail, social media and Council's website
- 1.2 Aims to provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding issues, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
- 1.3 Recognises that no one communication approach will work for everyone in all situations; Council commits to finding ways to connect with, inform and engage our diverse communities through a range of approaches and communication channels
- 1.4 Monitors and evaluates Council's community engagement processes to continuously improve community engagement practice
- 1.5 Undertakes community engagement at an appropriate time in the decision making or project planning process, so that project or decision outcomes can be influenced by the engagement
- 1.6 Regularly reviews Council's website for content currency and to ensure the website can be navigated easily and meets accessibility requirements
- 1.7 Maintains a 'Get the Facts' page on Council's website for corrections and media statements to appear when media articles do not represent Council fairly or accurately, and ensures these are also posted on Council's facebook page
- 1.8 Works with media to ensure accurate representation of Council ...
- 1.9 Regularly reviews communication methods to ensure they meet community needs and are cost effective

As a Facilitator, Council ...

- 2.1 Delivers an ongoing communication program regarding Council's services, programs, initiatives and decisions that is customer focussed
- 2.2 Builds a positive image of Council through consistent messaging and brand
- 2.3 Communicates in an open and transparent manner that is timely and responsive, simple and accessible, effective and responsible
- 2.4 Recognises that two-way communication is essential to strengthen the relationship between Council and the community, and to ensure that the delivery of Council's services is based on our community's needs
- 2.5 Facilitates improvement of internal communication throughout the organisation; building the capacity of councillors and staff to communicate, engage and champion Council strategic directions, services, programs and projects
- 2.6 Continues to strengthen relationships with the community so that engagement activities are ongoing conversations rather than isolated events

As an Advocate, Council ...

- 3.1 Uses information provided by community engagement to advocate on behalf of our community to relevant parties
- 3.2 Promotes the interests of the community to other decision makers and influencers
- 3.3 Advocates to form partnerships and strategic alliances with other parties in the interests of the Northern Midlands community
- 3.4 Recognises that keeping our community informed and engaging them in decision making significantly contributes to making the Northern Midlands an enviable place to live, work and play

Schedule of strategic projects

1 PROJECTS FROM THE STRATEGIC PLAN

As a Provider

- Customer Service Standards/Charter (update, confirm our commitment and standards)
- Information Technology Upgrade Program

As a Facilitator

- Annual Plans
- Elected Member Development

As an Advocate

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2 PROJECTS IN PROGRESS

(Projects not identified in Strategic Plan)

As a Provider

- Annual Reports
- Northern Midlands Courier – council page
- Website Review
- NM promotional videos in Council foyer

As a Facilitator

- Facilities Management Committees
- Flood Mapping
- Local District Committee forums
- Heritage Highway Tourism Region Association (HHTRA) promoting Northern Midlands as a 'must see' visitor destination

As an Advocate

- Support NTDC when advocating for projects of regional, state and national importance
- Developers promoting projects of significance, i.e. TRANSlink subdivision
- Local management committees promoting Council facilities and services

3 NEW PROJECTS SUGGESTED FOR CONSIDERATION

As a Provider

- Review/update our community engagement, customer service and communication guidelines and policies. A new toolkit will help ensure Council works within best practice standards in a coordinated way.
- Undertake an audit and improve our brand identity and communication methods, to help people understand who we are, what we do and why.
- Continue to develop our website and social media platforms to provide a better user experience, search, and accessibility, and grow our online community.
- Develop creative, innovative, and sharable content to tell our stories and keep people informed about the programs and services we deliver.
- Set up an online engagement hub to make it easier for people to join council-decision making processes and update our intranet.
- Continually review communication methods to ensure they are cost effective and meet community needs.
- Develop an annual communications and content plan to increase awareness about our programs, services, achievements and progress on Council Plan.
- Develop an ongoing training program for staff and councillors to embed communication and engagement into everything we do (i.e. media training, plain English writing, community engagement, customer service, business writing, web administration, writing for web and creating accessible documents)

As a Facilitator

- Work with other government and non-government organisations to distribute positive information about the municipality

As an Advocate

- Encourage third parties to promote services, events, etc.