

2012-2022 Ten Year Plan - Community Engagement Strategy

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council, for consideration, a summary of the proposed 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan community engagement strategy, with a particular focus on key engagement opportunities.

The proposed strategy is outlined in **Attachment A**.

Recommendation

That the Thames-Coromandel District Council:

1. Receives the report.
2. Determines that it believes it has complied with the decision-making provisions of the Local Government Act 2002 to the extent necessary in relation to this decision; and in accordance with the provisions of Section 79 of the Act determines that it does not require further information prior to making a decision on this matter.
3. Endorses the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Community Engagement Strategy.
4. Instructs staff to commence work in accordance with the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Community Engagement Strategy.

TO Thames-Coromandel District Council

FROM Katina Conomos - Senior Strategic Planner

APPROVED BY Peter Mickleson - Group Manager Policy and Planning

DATE 13 March 2011

SUBJECT **2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Community Engagement Strategy**

REPORT PURPOSE For Decision

Decision-Making Requirement

Decision-making Requirements Met

Significance has been considered and the decision is deemed

Significant Non-Significant

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Issue Definition

The Council is currently preparing its 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan. An important role of the Ten Year Plan is to provide information to the district communities about significant issues facing the delivery of services to the community so that the community in turn can provide feedback.

Getting the planning right will ensure that the selection of community engagement techniques and strategies is based on achieving the purpose of the engagement and meeting objectives set. The purpose of this community engagement strategy is to therefore ensure considered planning.

Recommendation

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3. Endorses the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Community Engagement Strategy.
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Background

The Thames-Coromandel District Council is currently preparing its 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan which is due to be adopted in June 2012.

The Ten Year Plan provides a long-term focus for the Council by identifying future issues, setting out its activities for the next 10 years, and detailing how the Council plans to fund those activities.

The engagement opportunities outlined in **Attachment A** are proposed at the time of writing, and are intended to be the key consultation opportunities throughout the Ten Year Plan project. The purpose of this report is to highlight the opportunities that exist and outline a community engagement approach. More detailed communications 'tasks' are proposed against each of these engagement opportunities for the Council's consideration.

Strategic Fit

This Community Engagement strategy is intrinsically linked to the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Project plan and scope. The strategy deals specifically with the Council's external customers.

Factors to Consider

Statutory Obligations

In promoting the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of their communities, councils need to be informed about what communities want and build these views into the works and services they provide. To achieve this, councils need to establish effective communication with their communities.

The Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) sets out the purpose of local government as being "to provide for democratic and effective local government that recognises the diversity of New Zealand communities" (s3). It establishes the role and responsibilities of councils as well as setting out how councils are expected to work with their communities.

Principles of Consultation

Councils also have responsibilities under other legislation, some of which also sets out consultation requirements (eg. Resource Management Act 1991). Whilst these statutory requirements exist, councils are still expected to undertake community consultation in line with the good practice principles set out in the LGA (s82(5)) outside of these responsibilities.

The principles for consultation set out in s82 (LGA) include:

- people should have reasonable access to information
- people should be encouraged to present their views to the Council
- people should have a clear idea of the scope of decisions that the Council has to make
- people should be given reasonable opportunities to present their views to the Council
- the Council should receive the views with an open mind and give them due consideration, and
- feedback should be given on the decisions and the reasons for them.

When making decisions the Council needs to consider the views and preferences of "people likely to be affected by, or have an interest in" the decision to be made (s76,78). However, it is not a requirement for the Council to consult on all matters where it has to make decisions (s78,79,82(3)). This recognises that there are areas where the Council has a mandate to act and provide as it sees fit for the communities' well-being, so long as it has an understanding of the communities' views and preferences.

Therefore, the Council has discretion as to how it observes these principles in each

particular instance but it must have regard to the extent to which current community views and preferences are known, the nature and significance of the proposal and the costs and benefits of any consultative procedure or process.

When making a judgement on what level of consultation within the community is appropriate, the Council has to consider the 'significance' of the issue, who might be affected and the implications of the decision (s79(2), 82(4)).

Opportunities for Maori to contribute to Council's decision-making processes also require consultation and information (s81, 82(2)).

Special Consultative Procedure

A specific provision in the LGA (s82d) requires the use of the special consultative procedure when adopting its Ten Year Plan.

In relation to the Ten Year Plan the special consultative procedure includes:

- making a statement of proposal (or draft) and summary of the proposal available for public inspection
- circulating the summary as widely as reasonably practicable as a basis for general consultation
- giving public notice of the consultation being undertaken and how people can participate
- giving all submitters written acknowledgement of their submission
- giving all submitters a reasonable opportunity to be heard, and
- making all submissions available to the public.

Underlying these requirements are a number of consultation principles prescribed in the LGA as noted above. These requirements form the legislative minimum required by the Council.

Ten Year Plan Project Objectives

Seven project objectives were identified in the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan project plan and scope as endorsed by the previous Council on 30 June 2010 and again by the current Council on 8 December 2010. The community engagement strategy has to give effect to these overall project objectives. The project objectives of particular focus should be:

- To strive for continuous and incremental improvement of the Ten Year Planning process
- To facilitate an integrated decision-making process in the development of the Ten Year Plan
- To meet the needs of the Ten Year Planning process's various customers
- To develop the Ten Year Plan in a sustainable and efficient manner while avoiding unnecessary expenditure waste
- To continue with our objective to build understanding of and generate informed discussion on the service levels and willingness to pay issue with our customers.

Local Government Sector Guidance

Best practice in the local government sector indicates that the following principles should underpin the development of community engagement strategies for Ten Year Plans.

- *Clarity of purpose* - This means understanding clearly why the engagement is occurring and being clear about desired outcomes and how participants can influence the decisions that may be made.
- *Robustness* - Good management practice is based on sound research and quality information. This principle is threefold - implying that a local authority provides quality information to participants; ensures accuracy and consistency of information provided; and a focus from the outset on realising a quality result.
- *Timeliness* - This principle recognises that consultation will be conducted in a timely manner, when it is most appropriate to do so in the context of the local government decision making process. This principle also recognises the requirement under the Local Government Act 2002 to enable participants reasonable opportunities to participate in consultation.
- *Customised* - This principle recognises that before consulting with customers the local authority needs to know who and where the customers are and how to consult in a way that is easy and appealing for them. What this means is that where possible and reasonable, consultation should be tailored to best suit the customers that the Council is trying to reach.

(Source SOLGM, *Piecing it Together*)

Balancing Engagement with Cost

As the Council will be aware, all engagement processes come at a cost. The extent of the cost usually correlates to the extent of the engagement opportunities provided. Past experiences indicate that the more time and resource invested in making engagement easier for and catered to the public and other stakeholders, the more relevant and effective the feedback is.

The Ten Year Planning process is one of the key opportunities for the public to have a say in Council business and direction. It involves many significant and complex matters including making trade-offs between the services delivered and the cost to users including ratepayers. Experience indicates that complying with minimal consultation requirements does little to make these matters clear to those who wish to submit, nor answer questions they may have.

Employing an engagement approach then becomes a choice then between catering consultation to our community preferences and keeping costs to a minimum.

The Role of Elected Representatives

The Council has emphasised empowering community boards to the greatest degree practicable. Councillors and community board members will be key advocates for Ten Year Plan community engagement when it comes to pushing information out into the community and attending community meetings.

Elected members also have the role of representing the community's views and preferences during the decision making processes, having to consider the views and preferences of "people likely to be affected by, or have an interest in" the decision to be made.

Media releases throughout the Ten Year Plan community engagement will include messages from the Mayor and other elected representatives as appropriate.

Further factors to consider are outlined in **Attachment A**.

Options

The following options exist:

Option A - Undertake a good practice approach to community engagement on the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan. This option has been further outlined in the draft 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Community Engagement Strategy as contained in **Attachment A**.

Option B - Take a minimal compliance approach to community engagement for the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan.

There are also a range of other variations of the above options including taking a 'best practice' approach.

Assessment of Options

Option A - Undertake a good practice approach to community engagement on the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan. This option has been further outlined in the draft 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan Community Engagement Strategy as contained in **Attachment A**.

This strategy represents a good-practice approach, with the legislative requirements taken as the minimum.

The strategy promotes early engagement on key issues with targeted interest groups, based on the 'timeliness principle' noted above, that engagement will be most effective when conducted in a timely manner, at the time most appropriate in the context of local government decision making. It advocates that earlier engagement on key issues should make the process of consulting on the draft plan easier and more effective.

As this approach will deploy a range of engagement tactics, the reach of the engagement should be comprehensive (and in staff opinion not overdone or extravagant), ensuring that our diverse communities have the ability to engage in a way that is convenient for their varying needs.

For example, this option could provide for several awareness campaigns; targeted early consultation with the community from June 2011 onwards and a presence across the District (rather than one or two settlements) throughout the special consultation period. The approximate cost of this approach to the Council would be approximately \$92,000 in addition to staff time.

Furthermore, under this option the draft Ten Year Plan document would not be going out 'cold' to the community but would rather be a confirmation that the Council has got it right.

Staff recommend that this option provides for a continuous improvement approach in keeping with the Ten Year Plan project objectives.

This planned approach provides for the Council's legislative minimums to be met and provides for the community to be given reasonable opportunities for their views to be heard.

By providing opportunities to make engaging with the Council easy, the staff view is this strategy will ensure a high quality of information to be gathered throughout the engagement process, which in turn should better inform Council decision making.

Option B - Take a minimal compliance approach to community engagement for the 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan.

The approximate cost of this option to the Council is \$46,000.

The Council has the option to adhere only to its statutory minimums for community

engagement.

This option represents a less expensive option for the Council that would also result in less staff time required in the short term. It would create a risk of more time being invested in the medium term as public feedback is less relevant or informed.

This option would involve the employment of less engagement tactics than Option A and the 2009-2019 Ten Year Planning process. For example it could mean no awareness campaigns or targeted consultation in advance of the statutory consultation requirement (special consultative procedure), limiting opportunities for providing feedback to written submissions and hearings and not investing in effective communication of the Ten Year Plan documentation and key messages.

It would therefore place a heavy emphasis on the summary document being the primary means of engaging with our communities and encouraging their participation should they wish to engage. Other advertising and collateral would be minimal under this option.

Staff would caution against this option as although it may technically meet the statutory minimums, given the diversity of the communities in the District, combined with our large absentee population, a one-size-fits all approach to community engagement is unlikely to deliver the Council robust information to inform its decision making.

Further, this option is unlikely to be perceived by the community as a high level of customer service in keeping with the Council's Vision statement.

Option A & Option B comparison

A comparison example tactics for each of the two options is presented below.

Engagement opportunity	Option A: Good practice approach** Tactic Examples	Option B: Minimal compliance approach Tactic Examples
Awareness campaign April-May 2011	Will include radio and print advertising. Media releases, website information etc.	n/a
Targeted consultation June 2011 onwards	As determined by the May meetings, could involve attendance at community meetings, printed collateral, specific mail outs and advertising.	n/a
Awareness campaign Oct-Nov 2011	Will include radio and print advertising. Media releases, website information etc.	n/a
Special consultative procedure Jan-Apr 2012	Summary leaflet to all ratepayers	Summary leaflet to all ratepayers
	Comprehensive summary for key stakeholders and interested parties.	
	Advertising (radio, print etc)	Minimal radio advertising
	Public notices	Public notices
	Open days across the District	Two public meetings
	Hearings across the District	Hearings only in Thames
	Councillors and Community Boards proactively involved in facilitating, prompting and/informing discussions	Responding to requests from the public as they are raised.
Approximate cost	Option A \$92,000	Option B \$46,000

The above table has been included as an example of tactics only.

Preferred Option

The preferred option is **Option A**.

Staff consider the community engagement strategy proposed in **Attachment A** to be a reflection of the direction signalled by the Council to date as well as a considered approach to the engagement opportunities that exist throughout the development of the Ten Year Plan.

Budget has been allocated in the 2011/12 financial year according to **Option A**.

Significance Assessment

The Council is required to comply with the decision making provisions outlined in Part 6 of the Local Government Act 2002. Council's Policy on Significance details thresholds and criteria that Council has determined it should consider in deciding whether a decision is significant.

Under the Council's Determining Significance Policy, a decision in accordance with the recommendation(s) is not considered to have a high degree of significance. The community engagement strategy does not trigger the significance thresholds. The decision being sought will affect the level of Ten Year Plan community engagement with all ratepayers, however this criteria alone isn't enough to trigger a significant decision.

The Council must also consider Sections 77 to 82 of the Local Government Act 2002, which deals with:

- Section 77 - reasonably practicable options;
- Section 78 - views of persons likely to be affected;
- Section 79 - degree of compliance with decision making provisions;
- Section 80 - inconsistent decisions;
- Section 81 - participation by Maori in decision making;
- Section 82 - principles of consultation

Staff are of the opinion that the content and recommendations in this report are consistent with the requirements of sections 77 through 82 of the Local Government Act 2002 and that the decision-making requirements have been met. However, the Thames-Coromandel District Council will also need to satisfy itself that it has sufficient information to consider that the decision making requirements of the Local Government Act 2002 have been met.

Staff are satisfied that the decision-making requirements of the Local Government Act 2002 have been met.

Conclusion

The purpose of the community engagement strategy is to ensure considered planning, regarding the various engagement opportunities throughout the Ten Year Plan process.

This report presents the proposed community engagement strategy to the Council, which promotes early engagement on key issues with targeted interest groups; proposes that engagement will be most effective when conducted in a timely manner, at the time most appropriate in the context of local government decision making. It advocates that earlier engagement on key issues should make the process of consulting on the draft plan easier and more effective.

Next Actions

Following Council's adoption of the recommendation, staff will commence work on an awareness campaign that will occur in advance of the Council meetings in May on Activity Plans.

Activity Plans will then be presented to the Council throughout May 2011 and further community engagement opportunities, as they relate to and arise from each activity, will be discussed with the Council at that point in time.

References-Tabled/Agenda Attachments

Attachment A 2012-2022 Ten Year Plan community engagement strategy (summary)