

Community Engagement Strategy (2016-2020)

Progress Report: September 2016 - December 2017



Bannockburn Primary School students participating in the Bannockburn Heart Play Space engagement field trip 2017

Prepared by Susan Firth-McCoy, Community Engagement Officer, February 2018

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Executive Summary

Golden Plains Shire Council is committed to enhancing the opportunities it provides to the community to be involved in Council's decision making processes. As part of this ongoing commitment, Council adopted its first Community Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) in August 2016. This Progress Report reviews Council's implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy over its first 15 months, from September 2016 – December 2017. There is significant evidence that Council is improving in its community engagement practice across the organisation, however we recognise that there are a number of areas for improvement which need to be addressed to ensure we achieve our objectives by 2020. The review has been structured according to the four key principles that underpin the Strategy which were based on the issues the community said were most important: genuine participation in decision making; transparency and the need for trust; fairness and equity; and effective planning and management.

Genuine participation in decision making

From September 2016 – December 2017, 12 Council departments delivered 36 community engagement processes, which is higher than the national average. We engaged with over 3,700 community members, which represents over 15% of Golden Plains Shire's total population. Our increased effort seems to be reflected in community satisfaction with Council's performance in engagement, which has continued to improve since the adoption of the Strategy, from 44/100 in 2015 to 48/100 in 2017 (Source: Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey). Nevertheless, community feedback suggests that more needs to be done to demonstrate that we truly listen to the community, and that community engagement opportunities always provide a genuine opportunity to influence the decision.

Transparency and the need for trust

Council has made a concerted effort to improve its transparency and open communication around community engagement. We regularly communicate about engagement opportunities and outcomes using a range of mediums such as our website, social media, the Gazette, local community newsletters, and posters. 80% of all public engagement processes provided publicly accessible information via Council's online engagement platform 'Have Your Say'. We have also improved our rate of 'closing the loop' as 95% of all public engagement processes reported back to the community on engagement outcomes, although further improvements are required to ensure we report back in a timely manner.

Fairness and equity

Council is committed to ensuring that all community members have a fair and reasonable opportunity to participate in engagement activities. As a result, over 85% of all engagement processes provided accessible opportunities such as workshops after work hours, pop-up conversation posts on weekends, or online engagement. Participant ages and geographic locations were also broadly representative of the Shire's demographics. There are a number of best-practice examples in the organisation of successful approaches to engaging with diverse groups, however improved internal processes and staff training are required to ensure that all engagement processes are accessible and inclusive for all members of our community.

Effective planning and management

A range of new internal systems, resources, and training have been developed to improve community engagement practice across the organisation. Staff feedback indicates that this support has increased their understanding of best-practice principles, and their motivation and capacity to engage with the community. However it is also clear that some areas of Council engage more than others, and there is significant inconsistency in the quality of engagement practice.

While the Community Engagement Officer has a number of current and planned actions to enhance knowledge and commitment to engagement across the organisation, achieving true excellence in community engagement will require organisational leaders to create a culture of community engagement, to ensure that best-practice principles and practice are embedded in all areas of the organisation.

Part 1: Background to the report

1.1 Introduction to the Progress Report

What is the purpose of this report?

Golden Plains Shire Council is committed to enhancing the opportunities it provides to the community to be involved in Council's decision making processes. As part of this ongoing commitment, Council adopted its first Community Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) in August 2016.

This Progress Report reviews Council's implementation of the Community Engagement Strategy over its first 15 months, from September 2016 – December 2017, including key achievements, areas for improvement, and recommendations for the next 12 months.

The key aims of this report are to:

- inform key stakeholders, including community members, staff, and Councillors, about key actions and achievements over the past 15 months
- increase understanding across the organisation about what is working in our approach, and what may need to be changed to ensure we achieve our objectives
- guide the priorities and actions in implementing the Strategy over the next 12 months.

How will this report be used?

This report is the first stage of a review of Council's implementation of the Strategy. It will be shared with the Strategy's key stakeholders, including community members, staff, and Councillors, to inform them about our implementation of the Strategy over the past 15 months. Following the report's publication, Council will provide a range of opportunities for stakeholders to provide feedback on Council's performance in community engagement. This feedback will be used to complete the review, which will inform our ongoing implementation of the Strategy.



How was this report prepared?

This report was written by Susan Firth-McCoy, Council's Community Engagement Officer in January – February 2018, using a range of data sources and her own experience and critical reflection on the organisation's performance (see Appendix 2 and reference list for more details on data sources). Sources include:

- Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey results (2017)
- Know Your Council website
- Council's website and online engagement platform - Have Your Say
- Google analytics for Council website
- The Golden Plains Shire Gazette
- Written reports on individual community engagement projects
- Communication from Council staff and managers (verbal, emails)
- Community Engagement Officer's workplan
- Staff intranet
- Meeting minutes.

1.2 Key terms

Community engagement	A planned process of interaction between Council and the community, where we ask for community input into Council decisions and actions. Community engagement is based on the belief that people affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision-making process, and includes a promise that the community's contribution will influence the decision.
Community	The people who live, work, study, and recreate in Golden Plains.
Stakeholders	Those who are interested in, or affected by, a particular Council decision or action. This includes community members and groups, local businesses and services, industry bodies, and government agencies.
Community engagement activities or methods	What we do to involve the community, and include things like workshops, community advisory groups, and surveys.
Community engagement practice	How we engage with the community, and includes the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to achieve inclusive and effective engagement.
Community engagement process	An instance of engagement for a specific Council project, program, or decision; and refers to all stages of planning, delivery, reporting back, and evaluating the engagement.
Council	The Golden Plains Shire Council, including staff, Councillors and the policies and guidelines that deliver the services, events, projects and initiatives.

1.3 About the Community Engagement Strategy

What is the purpose of the Community Engagement Strategy?

The Community Engagement Strategy:

- Guides Council in how to more effectively plan, deliver and evaluate effective community engagement practices
- Describes what is important to the community, and the context for community engagement across the Shire
- Outlines our vision for community engagement: to use well planned, clear, and transparent engagement practices to provide a range of opportunities for the community to be involved in Council's decision making
- Sets out the 'strategic directions', which are our overarching plans to improve community engagement practice across the organisation, and the actions that will help us achieve our goals.

Why was it developed?

The Strategy was developed as a result of Council's ongoing commitment to enhancing community engagement practice. This commitment was reinforced in 2015 as a result of community feedback that Council needed to improve the way it engaged with the community.

Who informed the Strategy?

- 820 community members responded to a Shire-wide survey in 2016
- 29 community members from across the Shire participated in a Community Reference Group
- 120 Council staff participated in workshops and interviews
- 7 Elected representatives (Mayor and Councillors) contributed.

Who uses the Strategy?

Council staff and Councillors use the Strategy to guide their efforts to continually improve community engagement practice across the organisation. Council employs one full-time Community Engagement Officer who supports the organisation in this work.

1.4 Why Council engages with the community

Community engagement is essential to achieving the core objective of local government, as outlined in the Local Government Act (1989):

“The primary objective of a Council is to endeavour to achieve the best outcomes for the local community having regard to the long term and cumulative effects of decisions.” (Local Government Act, 1989, Section 3c)

Community engagement helps us to make better decisions by harnessing stakeholders’ expertise, providing a reality check on our assumptions, and making it less likely that Council will make mistakes or waste effort. It also helps us to be transparent and accountable by raising awareness about the issue and what we plan to do, and demonstrating how the community has been involved.

Community engagement is also a fundamental human right. According to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006), Council must consider relevant human rights in making decisions:

“Every person in Victoria has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination, to participate in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives.” (Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act, 2006, section 18)

Community engagement empowers community members to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives, and ensures our actions respond to their expressed needs and priorities.

“The community elects its Council at periodic local government elections, but its involvement in local government should not stop there. It is fundamental to democracy that citizens have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.”

Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government 2014

1.5 Learn more

Visit Council’s online engagement platform **Have Your Say**

www.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/consultations

Sign up to Council’s **Community Engagement Register**

www.goldenplains.vic.gov.au/community-engagement-register

Contact the **Community Engagement Officer**

Susan Firth-McCoy | 03 5220 7111 | CommunityEngagement@gplains.vic.gov.au

Part 2: Progress towards goals

This section reviews our progress in implementing of the Community Engagement Strategy so far including our achievements, areas for improvement, next steps, and key recommendations. The review has been structured according to the four key principles that underpin the Strategy, which were based on the issues most important to the community.

The first three principles relate to the community's experience of Council's community engagement processes: 'Genuine participation in decision making'; 'Transparency and the need for trust'; and 'Fairness and equity'. The fourth principle 'Effective planning and management' relates to internal actions required to enhance engagement practice across the organisation. The review concludes with an overview of the community's satisfaction with Council's performance in engagement, based on the Local Government Satisfaction Survey 2017.

2.1 Genuine participation in decision making

Principles and goals¹

What's important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More opportunities to contribute to Council's decision making processes• More ways of participating – range of methods of engagement• More active participation opportunities (not just receiving information and filling in surveys – opportunity to speak with other community members)• Knowing that the engagement is genuine, not tokenistic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater rates of participation in engagement activities• Multiple options to participate in the engagement processes• Effective two-way communication with clear and relevant information• Genuine engagement – using the community's contribution to influence Council decisions.

Source: Community Engagement Strategy (2016-2020): Part A

Summary

Achievements

- 36 community engagement processes (23 public engagements and 13 with Council service users), 31 per annum, higher than national average (Source: Christensen 2017)
- 3,700 community members participated, representing over 15% of Golden Plains Shire's total population (although this may be an over-estimate as some individuals may have participated in multiple engagements)
- 1 in 3 engagement processes provided more than one method for community members to be involved
- Majority of processes (60%) used interactive methods, such as workshops, voting, or pop-up conversation posts; not just surveys or submissions
- 1 in 3 processes gave community members a higher level of influence over the process and/or outcomes of the project, not just informing or consulting
- Almost 20% of all staff and managers were trained in 'positive interactions with community' which resulted in increased staff motivation to engage with the community, and enhanced skills in face-to-face engagement, including empathy and active listening.

¹ The information under 'Principles and goals' under each section of the review has been drawn from various parts of the Community Engagement Strategy Part A. For full details, please see Appendix 3.

Areas for improvement

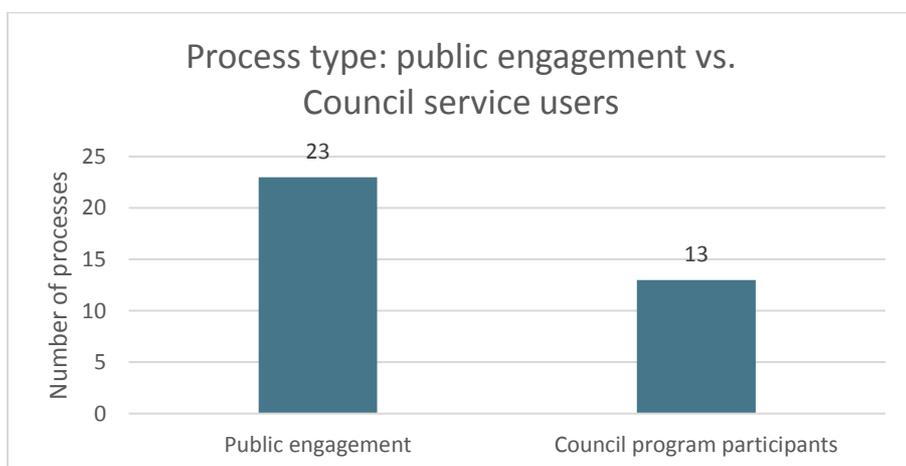
- A number of community members feel Council does not provide enough community engagement opportunities (Source: Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey 2017)
- Community members have indicated they want more in-depth and long-term involvement in issues that are important to them, however the majority of engagement processes were at the ‘consult’ end of the spectrum, meaning Council retained the overall decision-making power
- Some community members feel that engagement opportunities are not genuine, and many community members have commented that Council needs to listen more to community members (Source: Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey 2017).

Detailed review of progress

2.1.1 More opportunities to participate

From September 2016 to December 2017, Council conducted 36 engagement processes, including 23 ‘public’ engagements with the broader community, and 13 engagements with participants of Council programs and services (see chart below).² We engaged with over 3,700³ community members, which represents over 15% of our total population (22,000).⁴ In the calendar year from January – December 2017, Council conducted 31 engagement processes and engaged with 3,460 participants. The number of engagement processes is slightly above average for local governments according to a recent census of local governments, which reported an average of 29.4 conducted per council per annum (Christensen, 2017).⁵ For more details about each engagement process, please see Appendix 1: Engagement process table.

Anecdotal evidence from staff suggests that these numbers represent an increase in engagement opportunities and participants, as compared with years before the Strategy adoption. It is not possible to confirm this as data collection on engagement activities did not occur prior to the Strategy adoption, however this data will serve as a baseline for reporting in future years.



² These numbers do not include community engagement conducted as part of the Community Planning program, as this engagement is led by the community, for the community, with administrative and financial support provided by Council. For more information about Community Planning, please visit our [website](#).

³ Some participant numbers are approximate, for example at conversation posts or public workshops. This is noted in Appendix 1 where relevant. In addition, this total number may not represent a typical number of participants for this time period, as one engagement project reached over 1,000 community members (the Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow). Hence this number should not necessarily be used as a benchmark for future years.

⁴ Please note that some community members may have participated in numerous engagement processes, so this may be an overestimated percentage of the population.

⁵ Please note: it is not clear from Christensen’s research which types of engagement processes are included in this number, and it is possible that other Councils did not include engagements with Council service users in their reporting.

Area for improvement

Although overall Council has delivered a high number of engagement processes, community feedback from the Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey (2017) suggests that we are not necessarily providing all interested community members with opportunities to participate in the issues that are important to them.⁶ When asked about which areas Council needs to improve on, 6% of respondents (23/400) expressed the view that the most important thing Council needs to improve on is to consult more with the community:

“Get more feedback from members of the community, seek more feedback, need more community consultation and engagement.”

“They need to consult with the community a lot more.”

2.1.2 More ways of participating (range of methods)

A third of all engagement processes (12/36) provided more than one way of participating in an engagement process (see chart below). For example, the Community Planning Annual Review used face-to-face focus groups and individual written surveys; and the Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow used online, written and verbal surveys, workshops at schools, a parent focus group, and conversation posts at youth events, with a total of 9 different method types used (see Table 1).



Image: Council's Early Years staff hosting a conversation post at Children's Week event (2017)

The number and type of methods is determined by the scale of the project, the length of engagement, and the level of impact on the community. Accordingly, most long-term and large-scale used multiple methods, whereas most small-scale projects, such as service reviews, used only one method. Please see below chart for the number of methods used per engagement process.

⁶ The Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey is coordinated by the State Government Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, and run by independent consultants each year. The data is collected via phone survey with a random sample of 400 residents from Golden Plains Shire.

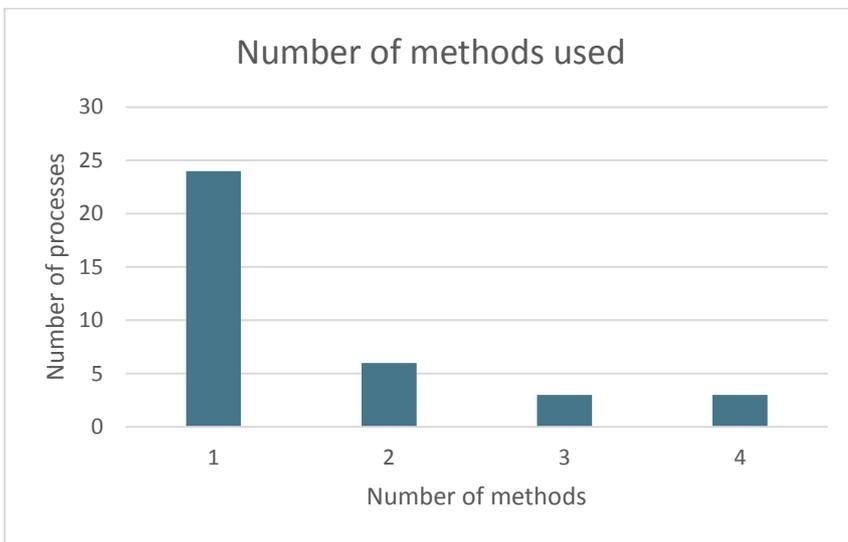


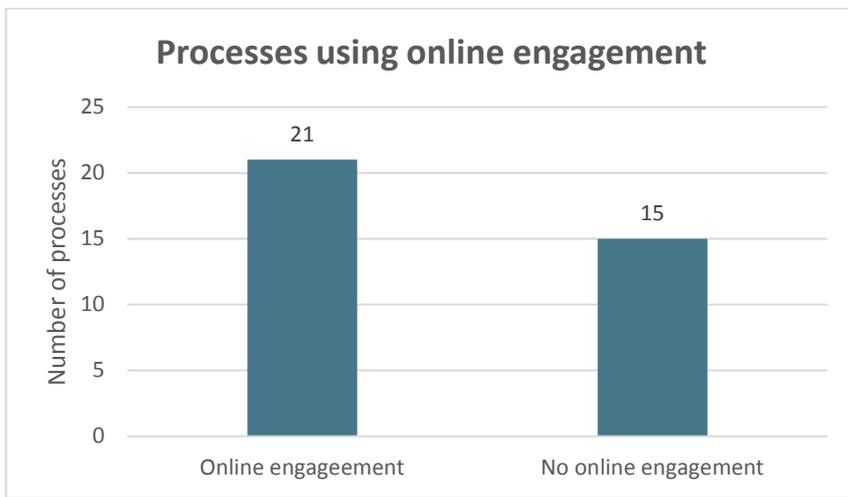
Table 1: Number of processes using each method type

Method	Number of processes
Survey	22
Conversation Posts	8
Workshops / drop-in sessions	6
Youth Committee	6
Submissions	3
Focus groups	2
Online Voting	2
Community advisory / reference group	2
Field trip	1

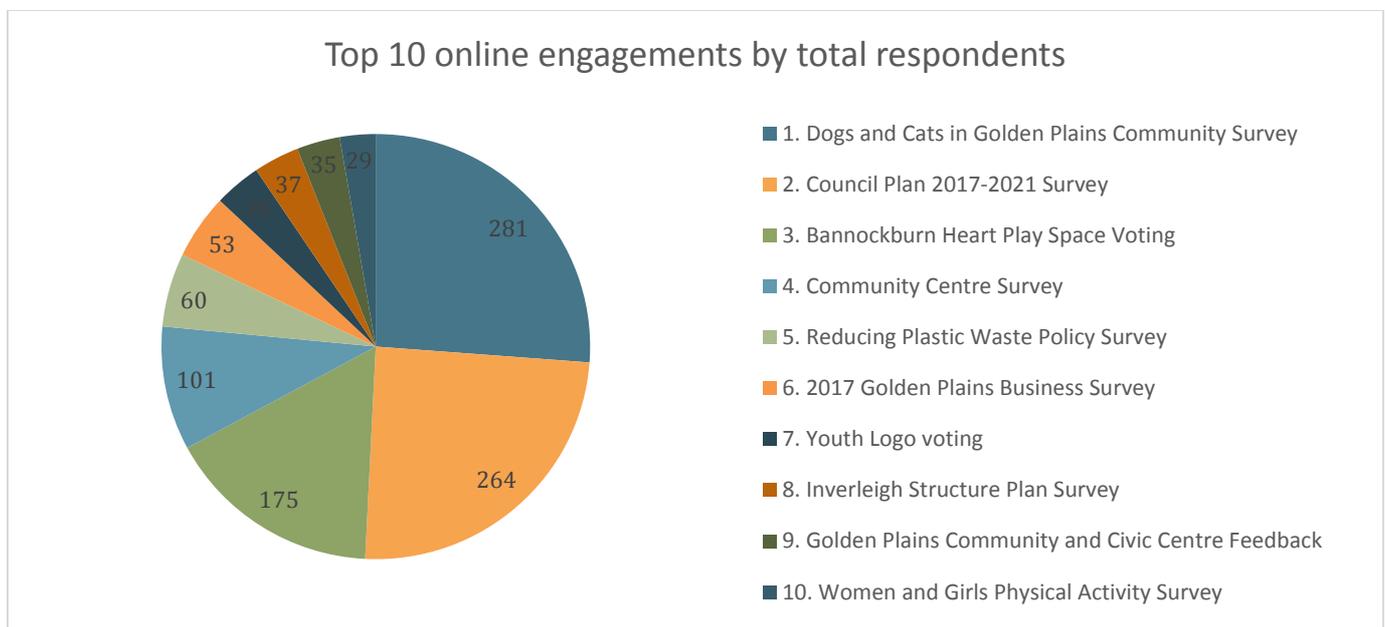
Online engagement

Using effective online methods is essential in Golden Plains Shire, with over 85% of our community accessing the internet from their homes, at a slightly higher rate than State and National averages ([ABS Census 2016](#)). For more information about online versus offline engagement opportunities, please see Section 2.3.

60% of engagement processes (21/36) from September 2016 to December 2017 used an online element (see chart below). This included online voting (e.g. Bannockburn Heart Play Space, Youth Logo); online surveys (e.g. Dogs and Cats in Golden Plains Community Survey); uploading submissions (e.g. Council Budget 2017-18); and feedback forms (e.g. Draft Economic Development Strategy).



In the period from October 2016 – December 2017,⁷ online engagements had a total of 1,213 participants.⁸ The graph below shows the top 10 online engagements by total submissions from October 2016 – December 2017.

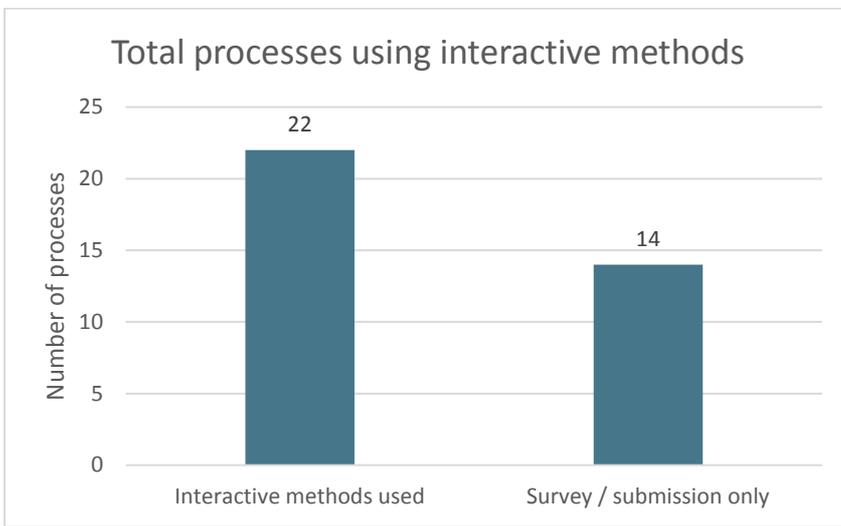


2.1.3 More active participation opportunities

The majority of engagement processes (60%) used interactive methods such as workshops, community reference and advisory groups, conversation posts, quick polls, and field trips (see chart below). A number of new initiatives contributed to Council’s use of interactive methods, including conversation posts (see Section 2.3) and an improved online engagement platform, which is detailed below and in Section 2.2.

⁷ Online data has been analysed quarterly to assist with understanding trends, and thus the start date for the analysis period is October rather than September 2016.

⁸ Survey participation data has been analysed by the number of submissions (1,213), rather than the number of unique pageviews (1,507) as a user could complete a survey over a number of sessions, or click through to a survey and decide not to complete it.



Area for improvement

While the majority of processes used interactive methods, 40% of processes used only surveys or submissions. Although these methods can be the most appropriate for some projects, Council is aiming to continually increase the number of interactive methods used. Staff training in face-to-face engagement facilitation held in 2017 should increase the number and effectiveness of interactive methods used in future engagement processes (see below section on genuine engagement for more details). In addition, training planned for 2018 in contemporary and creative engagement methods should further increase both the range of methods used overall, and the number of interactive methods used (see Section 2.4 for more details).

2.1.4 Higher level of influence

Community members have indicated they want more in-depth and long-term involvement in issues that are important to them, both locally in Golden Plains Shire and across the world (New Democracy Foundation 2017). Council is committed to meeting this expectation, and believes community members have a right to meaningful involvement in the issues that affect their lives. However, increasing collaboration between Council and community members must be balanced with careful use of Council resources, and a range of constraints which can limit the community’s involvement, such as legislation, external funding requirements, and best-practice processes.

Council uses the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) [Spectrum of Public Participation](#) to help determine the most appropriate level of influence for each process, which helps us decide on the best methods to use, and how to use the results.

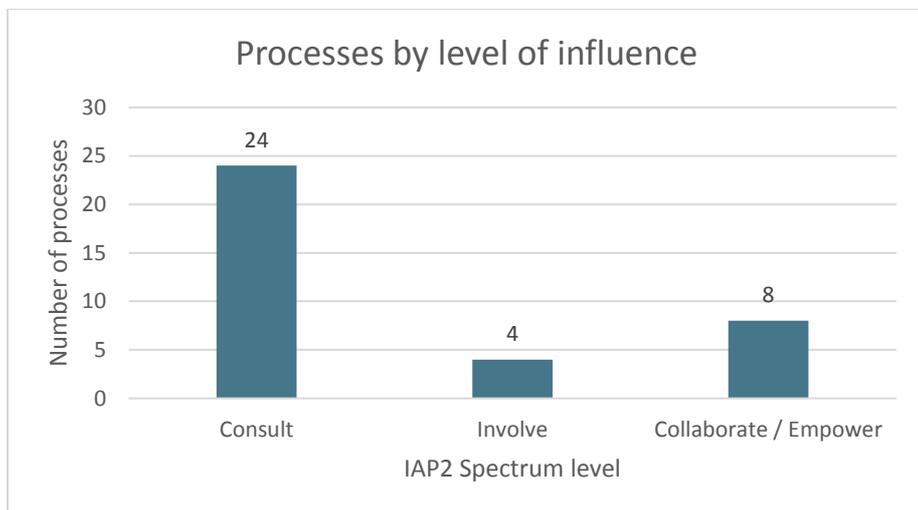
Spectrum of participation

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Engagement Goal	Provide community with balanced and unbiased information and updates.	Obtain input (ideas, opinions etc.) from community.	Work with community to prioritise issues and develop solutions.	Partner with community to develop recommendations and make decisions.	Place final decision-making in the hands of community.

Table based on IAP2 Spectrum of public participation

Since September 2016, Council delivered engagement activities across the spectrum of participation (see chart below for details). One in three of all processes engaged with community members at the levels of involve, collaborate or empower. A number of processes used multiple phases of engagement over a number of months such as the Council Plan (2017-2021) (see case study below), and a number of strategic planning projects such as the Inverleigh Structure Plan. This enabled community members to be involved in the entire process from contributing to draft plans, reviewing drafts, and giving feedback on final outcomes.

Council also collaborated with community members on a range of community reference groups and committees, working together to develop recommendations and make decisions, such as the Garibaldi Art Panel.⁹



Good practice example

An inspiring example of collaboration with community members are our ongoing youth committees, funded by the State government [FReeZA program](#), and facilitated by Council’s Youth Development team. Young people join a committee, and lead the planning, development, and delivery of events and programs for other young people in their community. For example, see Youth Empowerment Roadshow case study below.



Image: Teesdale Twilight Market FReeZA committee members 2017

⁹ For more information about any of the engagement processes mentioned in the report, please see Appendix 1 Project Table or visit Council’s [Have Your Say](#) page.

Case Study: Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow

In September - November 2017, the Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow (the 'Roadshow') was designed and delivered by local young people aged 12-18 years, with support from Council's Youth Development Team. The Roadshow aimed to help Council understand what local young people want in terms of activities and events across Golden Plains Shire.

The Roadshow delivered 16 engagement activities including: workshops at secondary schools; a parent/carer workshop; pop-up conversation posts at youth events; and a range of surveys. The Roadshow reached almost 1,500 young people from across the region, with 1,048 of these from Golden Plains. This is an incredible result as it represents 25% of our total population of young people of 4,200 people aged 10-25 years (Source: ABS 2016 Census).

How the process demonstrated best practice

- **Targeted recruitment:** The 'roadshow model' was used because of the unique challenges of access and transportation faced in rural and regional settings. This model enabled high rates of participation by outreaching to places and events where young people already spend their time, rather than expecting young people to attend a special engagement opportunity. This included attending secondary schools, local youth groups, and youth events.
- **Appropriate methods:** Engagement activities were designed by young people, for young people. Young people on the organising committee planned and tested all methods to ensure they would be effective for their target audiences. Experience from the Roadshow demonstrated that young people enjoyed a mixture of interactive, creative, and reflective methods. These included 'quick fire dot' surveys, paddle pop voting, traffic lights, and art design.
- **Empowering children and young people:** asking local young people about the activities and events they would like in Golden Plains Shire respected local young people's right to participate in matters affecting their lives. In particular, the young people involved in the organising committee felt that their participation had given them new skills, new opportunities, new friends and connection to community.



Image: Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow youth committee members and Council's Youth Development Officer at a conversation post at Children's Week event 2017

Area for improvement

Similar to other Councils in Victoria (VAGO 2017), the majority of activities (67%) remained at the 'consult' end of the spectrum, meaning that community feedback was considered as part of a range of data, with Council retaining the overall decision-making power. Council's goal is to continually increase the number of processes which engage community in a more collaborative way.

One way to achieve increased collaboration is through using **deliberative approaches**, such as citizens' juries and participatory budgeting. Many local Councils have been exploring deliberative approaches over the past few years, with nearly one in three committing to using deliberative methods in 2018 (Christensen 2017). However the cost and resources required to deliver this effectively has been a barrier for small rural Councils (Essential Services Commission 2018).

Golden Plains Shire Council's current Council Plan (2017-21) outlines a commitment to working towards more deliberative engagements, and in 2018 we will start exploring how we might use deliberative approaches in large-scale projects over the next 3 years, such as the long term Community Vision, and next Council Plan (2021-2025).¹⁰

¹⁰ The draft [new Local Government Act](#) (draft 2018) states that all Councils may be required to use a deliberative approach in developing their four year Council Plans and Council Budgets from 2020 onwards. At the time of writing, the new Local

What is deliberative community engagement?

“Deliberative engagement is about citizens being given adequate time, information and support to grapple with an issue or decision, and an opportunity to have direct influence over agency policies and programs.” (Mosaic Lab, 2017). Deliberative methods include citizens’ juries and participatory budgeting.

Principles of deliberative engagement (adapted from Mosaic Lab 2017)

1. Clear remit: A clear, plain English challenge or question is placed before a group.
2. Information: Detailed, in-depth information provided from multiple, diverse sources is provided to the participants to help them understand the dilemmas.
3. Representative: A random sample of people affected by the decision are recruited to participate.
4. Deliberative: The processes are built to ensure maximum involvement from all participants. The issues are weighed up and discussed in various ways before final recommendations are made.
5. Influential: The group’s report needs to be considered at the highest level of decision-making and responded to directly.
6. Blank page: All deliberative processes enable the participants to prepare their own thinking and report ‘from scratch’.

Learn more: www.newdemocracy.com.au; www.mosaiclab.com.au

Recommendation 1.1: Explore options for Council to implement more collaborative approaches, including deliberative processes for major projects over the next 3 years. If Council does commit to using a deliberative process, this must be adequately resourced to ensure it is effective and does not take away from all the other essential actions in building capacity in community engagement across the organisation.

2.1.5 Genuine engagement

A major emphasis of the Strategy’s implementation over the past 15 months has been on ensuring Council’s engagement processes are genuine, which means that we only engage with the community when they can have meaningful involvement, and that we always use the community’s contribution to influence our decisions.

What does genuine community engagement look like?

- Only engaging with the community when they can have an influence on the decision making process (i.e. not consulting after a decision has been made)
- Genuinely considering community feedback and being willing to make changes to the process or outcome
- Communicating clearly with the community at the start of the process what level of influence they will have over the process

Sometimes this means Council should not engage the community, but rather inform them of our direction, e.g. when:

- The community can have no influence over the decision (e.g. we have already made the decision or action is required by legislation)
- Council does not have the power to implement the decision (e.g. we do not have sufficient funding for the project, or a program’s priorities are dictated by State or Federal Government funding bodies)
- The best outcome should be determined by technical expertise.

To reflect the importance of genuine engagement, Council updated our definition of community engagement in 2017 to incorporate the [IAP2 Core Values](#) including a promise to use the community’s input:

Government Act was a draft exposure Bill, and still open for submissions. The final Act is expected to become legislation by mid-2018.

“Community engagement is a planned process of interaction between Council and the community, where we ask for community input into Council decisions and actions. It is based on the belief that people affected by a decision have a right to be involved in the decision making process, and includes a promise that the community’s contribution will influence the decision.” (Source: Golden Plains Shire Council Community Engagement Framework draft 2018)

The Community Engagement Officer has provided consistent advice and developed a range of resources for staff with the aim of ensuring staff managing engagement processes consider why they are involving the community and how feedback will be used, before they begin an engagement process. Resources include:

- Community engagement planning template which requires staff managing engagement processes to consider why they are involving the community and how feedback will be used, before they begin an engagement process
- A standardised communication template has been developed for Council’s online engagement platform, which requires staff to explicitly state how community input will be used to influence the decision-making process, and a ‘Timeline’ section which outlines when this will happen (please see section 2.2 for more information)
- A new Community Engagement Practice Framework (draft) has been developed, which includes highlights the ‘Using the results’ as one of six key steps in an engagement process (see section 2.4 for more details).

Areas for improvement

Community feedback from the Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey (2017) suggests that Council needs to be more responsive to feedback from the community. 7% of respondents (28/400) stated that Council needs to listen more to community members. It is likely that these comments relate to Council’s responsiveness beyond our formal engagement opportunities, including in everyday interactions with community members through our complaints and enquiries processes.

“Listen to the concerns of community members/rate payers, looking after their interests.”

“Listen more to the community, they are not listening.”

One way in which Council aimed to enhance responsiveness to community members was through the provision of staff training on ‘Positive interactions with community’, facilitated by community engagement expert Jen Lilburn from Kismet Forward in October – December 2017. The training had high rates of participation, with 27 staff and 7 managers participating, making up almost 20% of all staff and managers (34/192 permanent staff). This training aimed to improve staff confidence and skills to facilitate positive face-to-face engagement and manage conflict. Key messages of the training included the importance of empathy and active listening. Participant feedback indicated that the training increased motivation to engage with the community, and enhanced skills in face-to-face engagement.

Recommendation 1.2: Provide key elements from ‘Positive interactions with community’ training as part of ongoing introductory community engagement staff training session (see section 2.4 for more details).

Recommendation 1.3: People and Culture unit to continue to work towards improved systems and clear standards for customer service across the organisation, to enhance responsiveness beyond formal engagement opportunities, including interactions with community members through our complaints and enquiries processes.

In addition to improving overall listening and responsiveness, some survey responses (4/400) suggest that Council also needs to improve in demonstrating that its planned engagement opportunities are genuine.

“They are running a lot more open consultations but they need to take on board the feedback from residents.”

“When they ask for community consultation and participation, they should follow up any suggestions. In general, they should listen to community rather than ignoring consultation...but the decision has already been made, makes people cynical to participate.”

A small number of examples from the past 15 months suggest that ensuring engagement is genuine is an ongoing challenge internally, for instance:

- Staff determined how they would use results after the engagement process has started
- Decision-makers wanted to engage with community to increase support for an existing decision (retrospective engagement)
- Decision-makers were not willing to actually use the results from an engagement process (i.e. when confronted with unexpected feedback, not willing to give up power over the 'best' decision)
- The engagement process was started without confirmation that projects were fully funded.

Good practice example

Despite the need for ongoing improvement in this area, there are a number of good practice examples of genuine engagement opportunities, including the Community Planning Annual Review, FReeZA youth committees, and the Council Plan 2017-2021 (see case study below).

Case study: Council Plan (2017-2021)

The Council Plan (2017-2021) is our overarching strategic plan which guides Council's work across its four year term. Improving our engagement on the Council Plan was identified as a key action in the Community Engagement Strategy, as previous Council Plans only provided limited opportunities for community involvement through a statutory submission process.

Increasing the involvement of the community in developing the Council Plan was a major focus for the whole organisation during 2016-17. This was demonstrated by an internal Steering Group made up of managers and staff from all directorates which guided the community engagement process, and a number of staff from across the organisation who volunteered to run conversation posts across Shire.

More active opportunities: In 2016-17, Council engaged with 380 community members from across the Shire including a number of active engagement opportunities:

- 263 residents provided feedback via the survey which was mailed to all households
- 82 community members and stakeholders engaged face-to-face via listening posts and workshops
- 27 community members formed a Community Reference Group which met 3 times to provide in-depth feedback on the Council Plan
- 8 submissions on the draft Plan were received from individual community members, the Community Reference Group, and external stakeholders.

Genuine influence over the outcomes: Feedback gathered through the engagement process had a real influence on the process and outcome of the Council Plan:

- The vision, mission and values statements, and the objectives for each strategic direction were guided by feedback from the survey, workshops, and the Community Reference Group's 1st workshop
- 16 substantial changes were made to the Draft Council Plan document as a direct result of the Community Reference Group's feedback in their 2nd workshop and written submission
- The Community Reference Group provided feedback in their 3rd workshop that the final Council Plan document could be difficult to read for some members of the community. As a result, a plain English version of the Council Plan has now been developed in collaboration with Scope Disability Support Services Victoria, and will be promoted in the community in 2018.

Recommendation 1.4: Ensure the new Community Engagement Policy outlines when community engagement is required, encourages staff to use multiple methods, and mandates that engagement is always genuine, and uses an appropriate level of the IAP2 spectrum.

Recommendation 1.5: Community Engagement Officer to continue to provide advice, training, and resources to staff to increase:

- community, staff and Councillor understanding of genuine and effective engagement
- the number of engagement opportunities, participants and methods used
- proportion of processes which use a higher level of the IAP2 spectrum (involve, collaborate, empower)

Measuring our progress over the next 12 months

- Increased number of engagement opportunities, participants and methods used
- Increased proportion of processes which use a higher level of the IAP2 spectrum (involve, collaborate, empower)
- Increased understanding of staff, managers, and Councillors about the importance of genuine and meaningful engagement
- Evidence that Council consistently uses the community's input to influence the decision
- Improved customer satisfaction that Council is providing sufficient and genuine engagement opportunities.

2.2 Transparency and the need for trust

Principles and objectives

What's important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Openness and transparency of both the engagement and decision-making processes• Clear and timely communication about opportunities• Demonstrate how community input has influenced the outcome• Close the loop: provide information to participants and broader community about the final decision• Knowing that the input from consultations will be considered and not ignored.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open communication and publicly accessible information about the engagement process and how this influenced the decision or outcome• Timely communication that enables a reasonable opportunity for the community to give input to the engagement processes• More frequent demonstration of feedback on engagement outcomes being provided to key stakeholders and community• Community has improved understanding of Council's decision-making processes.

Source: *Community Engagement Strategy 2016-2020: Part A*

Summary

Achievements

- New standardised communication templates are being consistently used by staff to ensure community members can access key information including: why we are engaging, what is negotiable, what level of influence community will have, and how we will use their feedback
- Improved accessibility of Council meetings, which are now held after work hours (as of February 2018)
- Almost 90% of public engagement processes provided publicly accessible information, documents, project timelines and contact details via Council's online engagement platform 'Have Your Say'
- Over 5,000 unique pageviews and an overall trend of increasing community interaction with 'Have Your Say'
- 90% of Golden Plains Shire Gazette editions featured articles about community engagement, averaging 2.5 articles per edition
- 120 community members signed up to the new Community Engagement Register, a database of Golden Plains Shire community members who are interested in participating in engagement activities
- Improved rate of 'closing the loop'. Over 80% of all engagement processes reported back to the community on engagement outcomes, and 95% of all public engagement processes either provided feedback or are scheduled to provide feedback in early 2018.

Areas for improvement

- Some community members feel that Council does not communicate effectively about engagement opportunities, and would like communication to be more frequent, direct, and timely (Source: Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey 2017)
- Communications about engagement opportunities in the Golden Plains Shire Gazette are sometimes lacking in specific information about how to get involved
- A small number of projects were untimely in closing the loop, and took over 6 months to provide feedback to participants after results had been analysed.

Detailed review of progress

2.2.1 Openness and transparency

Advice from the Community Engagement Officer and standardised communication templates have aimed to improve the openness and transparency of Council's communication with community. This ensures we clearly communicate at the start of the process why we are engaging, what is negotiable, what level of influence community will have, and how we will use their feedback.

While all Council meetings (where key decisions are made) are open to the public, the timing of meetings during work hours was identified as a barrier to accessibility for many community members in the Strategy. Council is currently exploring ways to make their meetings more accessible including the timing, location, and possibilities for streaming meetings online. *Author's note: as of February 2018, Council changed their meeting times to start at 6pm rather than 4pm, to enhance openness and transparency.*

Good practice example - transparency

At the final Community Reference Group workshop for the Council Plan (2017-21), group members reviewed the final document and evaluated the engagement process. Members were provided with a table outlining each of the group's recommendations from the previous workshop, Council Officers' responses, and Councillors' final decision. This full transparency was greatly appreciated by participants, as it allowed them to see clearly the impact of their contribution, and to understand the decision-making process, even when Council did not include their recommendations in the final document.

Recommendation 2.1: Managers to take responsibility for ensuring all engagement processes are transparent by communicating openly with the community about the engagement and decision-making processes, and the influence of the community feedback on the final outcome.

Recommendation 2.2: Community Engagement Officer to continue to highlight the importance of transparency, and share good practice examples through staff training, inductions, and individual advice and support.

2.2.2 Clear and accessible communication

Council uses a variety of ways to communicate about engagement opportunities and outcomes including:

- Council website (news, events calendar, Have Your Say)
- Social media (Twitter and Facebook)
- Golden Plains Shire Gazette (bi-monthly posted to 10,000 households)
- Local community newsletters
- Conversation Posts (see Section 2.3)
- Posters in public spaces (e.g. libraries, shops, bus stops)
- Targeted communication with stakeholders (emails, phone calls, attending meetings)

A number of engagement processes have aimed to make communication accessible to all members of the community by using methods such as posters in community spaces (e.g. Bannockburn Heart Play Space, Bannockburn High Street Beautification); infographic displays of data (e.g. [Council Plan 2017-21 engagement results](#)); and videos (e.g. [Inverleigh Flood Study](#)).

Area for improvement

Some respondents to the Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey (2017), (2%; 7/400), suggested that Council needs to further improve its communication about engagement opportunities:

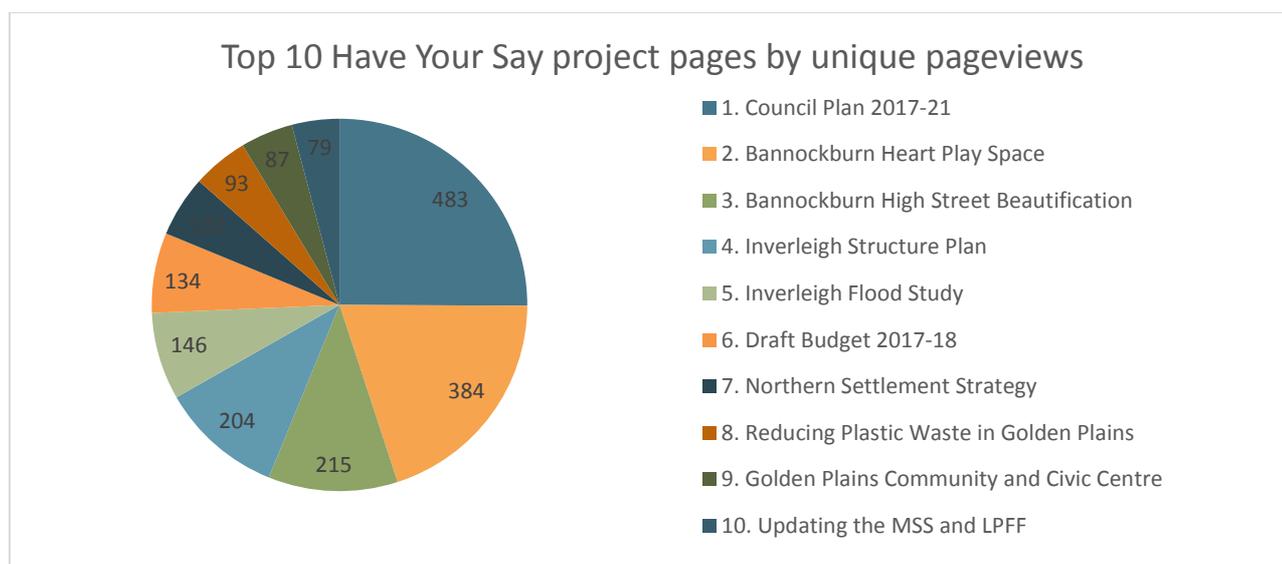
“Public consultation, I don’t get any information about what they’re doing.”

“We don’t get enough feedback about what they are doing now and in the future - we get a glossy newsletter that only tells us what they’ve already done, we’d like to know what they’re discussing, and decisions they want to make – maybe we could get something like that monthly, that could even be via email.”

Current and future actions which aim to address these concerns are outlined below, including the ‘Have Your Say’ online engagement platform; the Golden Plains Shire Gazette; and the new Community Engagement Register.

Have Your Say online engagement platform

[Have Your Say](#) is Council’s online engagement platform which provides information and updates about public engagement processes, and opportunities to participate in online engagement activities. Almost 90% of public engagement processes (20/23) delivered from September 2016 to December 2017 had a designated project page on Have Your Say.¹¹ Please see the graph below for the top 10 most viewed project pages during October 2016 – December 2017.



There is an overall trend of increasing community interaction with the Have Your Say platform. In the period from October 2016 – December 2017,¹² the Have Your Say home page ranked as 49th most viewed page on Council’s corporate website. The Have Your Say platform (including home page and project pages) had over 3,500 unique pageviews,¹³ and online engagements (surveys and voting) had over 1,500 unique pageviews. Combined, this represents over 1.8% of all unique pageviews on Council’s website during this period (5,053/286,688).¹⁴

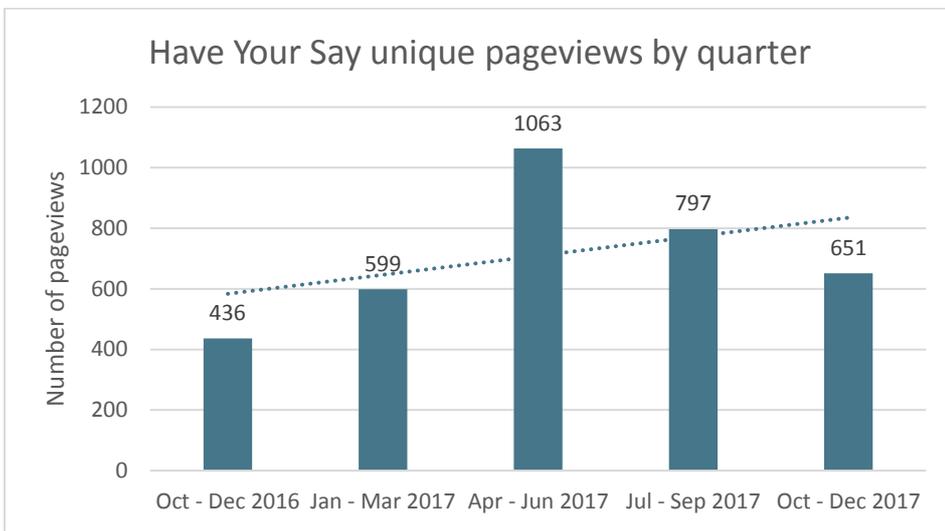
When the total Have Your Say unique pageviews are analysed by quarters (see graph below), the trend suggests there has been an overall increase in online participation since October 2016, with some variation across quarters. However as the platform has only been in its current format since 2015, and online engagement data has not been analysed in the past, it is not possible to measure the degree to which online engagement has changed since the Strategy adoption. However the data provided in this report can be used as a baseline to measure future trends.

¹¹ This number does not include the 13 engagements with Council service users, as they are targeted consultations, and therefore inappropriate for Have Your Say which is a public platform.

¹² Online data has been analysed quarterly to assist with understanding trends, and thus the start date for the analysis period is October rather than September 2016.

¹³ Unique pageviews are the number of user sessions per page, and does not include multiple clicks to the same page within a single session (one session is defined by Google Analytics as a 30 minute time period).

¹⁴ The number of unique pageviews for surveys and Have Your Say pages are likely to represent some of the same user sessions, as some users access online surveys via a Have Your Say project page. However not all user sessions will be the same as some users access survey pages from a direct link from other sources such as a social media post, or an email from Council staff member. In addition, some engagement projects with online surveys did not have a Have Your Say project page.



Improvements to the Have Your Say **home page** launched in November 2017 aimed to increase participation and usability of the platform (see image below or visit the [home page](#)). Changes included providing more information about each project on the home page to increase the incentive to click through to project pages and a new search tool to make it easier for community members to find projects based on their interests.

A standardised communication template and improved design of the Have Your Say **project pages** ensures that all projects consistently communicate information which is important to the community. This includes: the purpose of the engagement; how the community can be involved; how community input will be used; a clear timeline for the process; staff contact information; and links to important documents (see example below, or by following the [link](#)).

Homepage

HAVE YOUR SAY

Share this:

JOIN THE CONVERSATION BY CLICKING ON A PROJECT BELOW.

To stay informed about engagement opportunities relevant to you, sign up to Council's Community Engagement Register: [SIGN UP >](#)

To find out about Council's approach to community engagement, see our [Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan](#).

SEARCH FOR A CONSULTATION

Name	Project Status	Category
<input type="text"/>	- Any -	- Any -

[SEARCH >](#)

CURRENT

Current or upcoming opportunities to participate.

<p>COUNCIL PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW</p> <p>Have your say on Council's annual review of the Council Plan (2017-2021), to ensure the document continues to be effective over the next three years.</p> <p>Updated: Feb 21 2018 Learn More ></p>	<p>INVERLEIGH FLOOD STUDY</p> <p>The flood study will update information about flooding in Inverleigh, including potential impacts on residents, properties and infrastructure.</p> <p>Updated: Sep 04 2017 Learn More ></p>	<p>INVERLEIGH STRUCTURE PLAN</p> <p>The Inverleigh Structure Plan provides a framework for future land use planning decisions for the town.</p> <p>Updated: Dec 19 2017 Learn More ></p>
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Project page example

BANNOCKBURN HEART PLAY SPACE

Share this:

Thank you to the 300+ community members who provided feedback on the play space during August and September! [SEE THE RESULTS >](#)

ABOUT

The Bannockburn Heart is a visionary project that will transform a site in the centre of Bannockburn (adjacent to the Bannockburn Cultural Centre and Library) into a vibrant, open civic space for residents and visitors. In 2013, we kick-started the project by asking the community, including local children, what their vision was for the space. Residents' valuable ideas and feedback helped us to develop the original vision plan for the precinct - and, more recently, the Bannockburn Heart masterplan (linked below).

The play space is a key feature of the Heart and will include Golden Plains Shire's first public water play splash pad, a dedicated area for adventure play equipment, and active recreation fitness equipment.

[VIEW THE BANNOCKBURN HEART MASTERPLAN >](#)

ENGAGEMENT UPDATE

Thanks to the invaluable feedback of 29 Bannockburn Primary School young leaders in August 2017, and previous community consultation from 2013, [confirmed elements](#) include a flying fox, a universal spinner, a birds nest swing and a public toilet - wish more elements to be confirmed in the coming months as part of the detailed design process.

Thank you to the 300+ community members who participated in our online or in-person voting in September 2017. Results show voters support a natural 'look and feel' with some colourful elements, as well as a fun fitness circuit! [See the results](#).

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Feedback gathered through community engagement will feed into the development of the final designs for the play space, which we expect to be finalised in June 2018. It is anticipated major construction will commence in mid 2018 and that the project will be completed in December 2019.

TIMELINE

- 2013: Initial community engagement for overall project
- Jan 2014: Vision Plan report published
- Jun 2017: Masterplan updated
- Sep - Oct 2017: Community feedback on draft designs for play space
- Jun 2018: Detailed designs finalised
- Dec 2019: Project completion

CONTACT INFORMATION

David Greaves
Works Manager
5220 7111
enquiries@ggplains.vic.gov.au

LINKS

- [Bannockburn Heart 2017 masterplan](#)
- [Bannockburn Heart 2013 vision plan](#)
- [Bannockburn Heart project update page](#)
- [Approved play space equipment](#)

Recommendation 2.3: Community Engagement Officer to continue to work with the Communications and Marketing team to promote the Have Your Say platform through social media, the Gazette, the new community engagement e-newsletter, and other communications methods.

Recommendation 2.4: Relevant staff members engaged in community engagement practice to attend training planned for 2018 in managing content on the Have Your Say site so that they can edit their own content to enhance timeliness and efficiency of communication.

Golden Plains Shire Gazette

Council publishes a bi-monthly newsletter, the Golden Plains Shire Gazette, which is posted to all households. This is an important communication method as there is no Shire-wide local paper. 90% of Gazette editions since September 2016 (8 out of 9) have featured articles about community engagement, with a total of 19 articles, averaging 2.5 articles per edition. Articles have provided a range of information including: upcoming opportunities to participate (11/19); reporting back on engagement outcomes and project results (8/19); and a direct opportunity to participate (1/19). Please see below table for more details.

Table 2: Community engagement articles in Golden Plains Shire Gazette

Gazette edition	Articles about community engagement	Information provided
October 2016	None	N/A
December 2016	Council Plan	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
	Inverleigh and Meredith Skate Parks refresh	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
February 2017	Local Law No. 2 'General Public Amenity	report back on project outcomes
	Inverleigh Structure Plan	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
	Barwon South West Skate competition	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
April 2017	Environment Strategy Review	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
	Council Plan	Report back on engagement process and outcomes
June 2017	Council Budget 2017-18	Report back on Budget engagement process and outcomes Information about project upcoming engagement opportunities for Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre
	Inverleigh Structure Plan	Report back on engagement process and outcomes
	Youth Survey	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
	Council Listening Posts	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
August 2017	Bannockburn Heart Play Space	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
	Youth Logo	Report back on engagement process and outcomes
	Council Plan	Report back on engagement process
	Conversation (listening) posts	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
October 2017	Golden Empowerment Youth Roadshow	Upcoming opportunities for engagement
Dec 2017	Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre project	Tear-out survey
	Northern Settlement Strategy	Report back on project progress
	Engagement Roadshow	Report back on engagement process

Area for improvement

While the rate of communication about engagement in the Gazette is an achievement in the area of transparency, the content of communication has been identified as an area for improvement. Many articles promoting upcoming opportunities did not contain specific information about when and where community members could participate.

In addition, articles aiming to close the loop often provided information about the process of engagement (e.g. methods and participants) with no details about the engagement results or project outcomes. Providing concrete details can be an internal challenge due to articles for the Gazette needing to be prepared over six weeks in advance, however Council will aim to provide links to Have Your Say or staff contact information at a minimum in future, so that community members are aware of how to find out more detailed information.

Recommendation 2.5: Communication and Marketing team to work with staff managing engagement projects to provide more specific information in Gazette articles about community engagement.

New Community Engagement Register

The Community Engagement Register was launched in October 2017, and currently has 120 members. The Register is a database of Golden Plains Shire community members who are interested in participating in engagement activities. It aims to connect interested community members directly with engagement opportunities, as people are more likely to respond to a personal invitation to participate, than to spontaneously check Council's website or social media pages. It also provides Council with a means of giving feedback on engagement outcomes and project updates to participants in a direct and timely way. The Register is also designed to help Council involve relevant community members for each project, as members provide some demographic data when signing up (e.g. town of residence, age, gender). At the time of writing this report, the Register had not yet been utilised, as the focus in the first 3 months has been on building its membership. Plans for 2018 include increased promotion (both internally and externally), and a regular e-newsletter to inform members of upcoming opportunities.

Recommendation 2.6: Community Engagement Officer and the Communications and Marketing team to provide ongoing promotion of the new Community Engagement Register by including a link in every online survey, and through key communication channels (e.g. the Gazette, website, posters, and local newsletters)

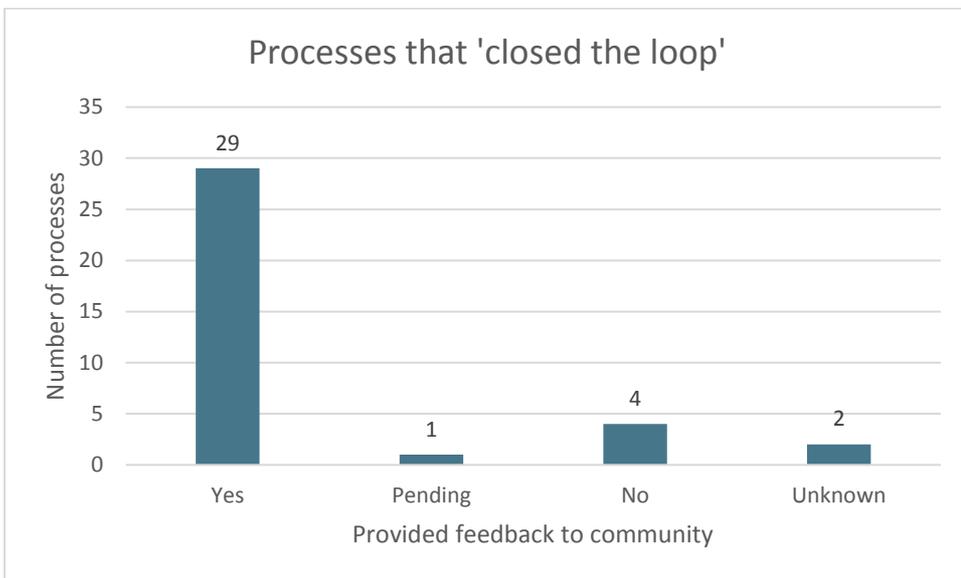
Recommendation 2.7: Community Engagement Officer to conduct a review of the Register in September 2017 (six months after the first newsletter has been sent) to evaluate its effectiveness.

2.2.3 Closing the Loop

'Closing the loop' is essential to transparent engagement practice, and was identified as one of the most important areas for improvement in the Strategy. Closing the loop refers to when Council provides information to participants and the broader community about the outcomes of an engagement process. When community members have volunteered their time and expertise, it is only fair that we tell them what we have done with their information.

Council reports back to the community on engagement processes in a number of ways including regular updates on the Have Your Say site, social media posts, posters in local community spaces, and direct correspondence with participants. At the time of writing this report, over 80% of engagement processes (29/36) had provided feedback on their progress or outcomes to the community. 95% of all public engagement processes (22/23) provided feedback or were scheduled to provide feedback in early 2018.

The Community Engagement Officer conducts regular monitoring of which engagement processes are due to report back to the community via reviewing both Council's Have Your Say page, and a database of all current engagement processes. To emphasise this importance of closing the loop, 'Reporting Back' is one of the six steps outlined in the new Community Engagement Practice Framework (draft) (see section 2.4 for more details).



Area for improvement

Closing the loop remains an area for improvement as some engagement processes took over 6 months to report back to community after the results had been analysed. New internal community engagement management software (due to launch in March 2018) should assist in improving timeliness in closing the loop. The software includes a tracking tool which sends automatic emails to staff to remind them to report back to the community once engagement results have been analysed (see Section 2.4 for more details). This tracker will also assist the Community Engagement Officer to more efficiently monitor the timeliness of reporting back across the organisation.

Recommendation 2.8: Managers to take responsibility for ensuring their staff ‘close the loop’ when informed by the Community Engagement Officer that their engagement processes are overdue for reporting back.

Recommendation 2.9: The new Community Engagement Policy to mandate that engagement processes always use community feedback to influence our decision-making process, and always report back to community members on the outcomes (closing the loop).

Measuring our progress over the next 12 months

- Increased number of unique pageviews for Have Your Say online engagement platform
- Evidence of improved communication in Gazette articles including more information about how to participate and regular reporting on engagement outcomes
- Increased membership of the Community Engagement Register, increasing percentage of opens and click throughs to the regular e-newsletter, and regular use of the Register by staff for targeted promotions
- Continued improvement in the rate and timeliness of staff ‘closing the loop’ with participants and the broader community.

2.3 Fairness and equity

Principles and goals

What's important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Fair and reasonable opportunity to become involvedAccessible and inclusive engagement opportunities for all who want to participate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Better representation from diverse community and stakeholder groups across the ShireAppropriate time, venue, and location for those who are affected by, and interested in, the engagement.

Source: *Community Engagement Strategy 2016-2020: Part A*

Summary

Achievements

- Participant ages and geographic locations were broadly representative of the Shire's demographics.
- Evidence of some excellent practice examples of creative and successful approaches to engaging with specific age groups including children, young people, and older residents
- Over 85% of all engagement processes provided accessible opportunities such as workshops on weeknights after work hours, pop-up conversation posts on weekends, or online engagement
- 40% of Council engagement processes used an outreach approach and linked their engagement with an existing community event, meeting or space; making it easier for community members to participate
- Engagement opportunities were regularly shared with Council's Access and Inclusion committee, and an accessibility checklist was developed to enhance the inclusion of community members with disabilities
- 70% of all engagement processes with an online component also provided an offline option (e.g. hard copy, or face-to-face), to ensure accessibility for those who are not comfortable using the internet, or have poor or no internet access
- 18 pop-up conversation posts were held at community events and spaces across the Shire, reaching over 1,000 community members.

Areas for improvement

- Inconsistency in ensuring that all relevant demographic groups are involved in engagement processes, including children and young people, and community members with disabilities
- Despite community preference for Council linking engagement opportunities with existing events and community group meetings, the majority of engagement processes (60%) used stand-alone opportunities
- Some community members feel Council staff and Councillors need to 'get out and be seen' engaging in the community more (Source: Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey 2017).

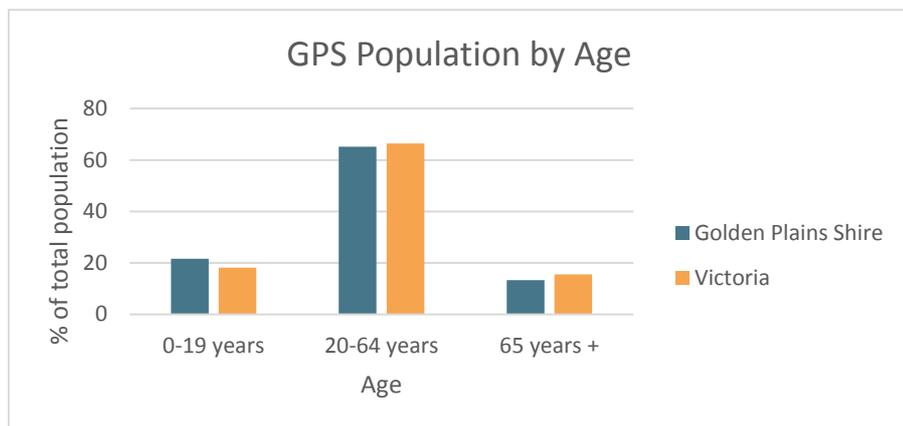
Detailed review of progress

2.3.1 Representation from diverse community and stakeholder groups¹⁵

Participant ages and geographic locations were also broadly representative of the Shire’s demographics.

Golden Plains Shire demographic snapshot

Age: Golden Plains Shire has a relatively young population, with children and young people aged 0 – 19 making up 21.6% of the population (higher than the state average of 18.1%), and families with children making up 17% of the population (higher than state average of 15.6%).



Location and density: The Shire has 56 communities and 16 townships across 2,704 square kms, with Bannockburn as the Shire’s main service. The Shire has a low population density of 0.08 persons per hectare (compared with state average of 0.27).

Town Name	Population (2016)
Bannockburn	5,283
Teesdale	1,721
Batesford	952
Inverleigh	1,474
Lethbridge	1,014
Smythesdale	1,032
Enfield	538
Meredith	788
Linton	580

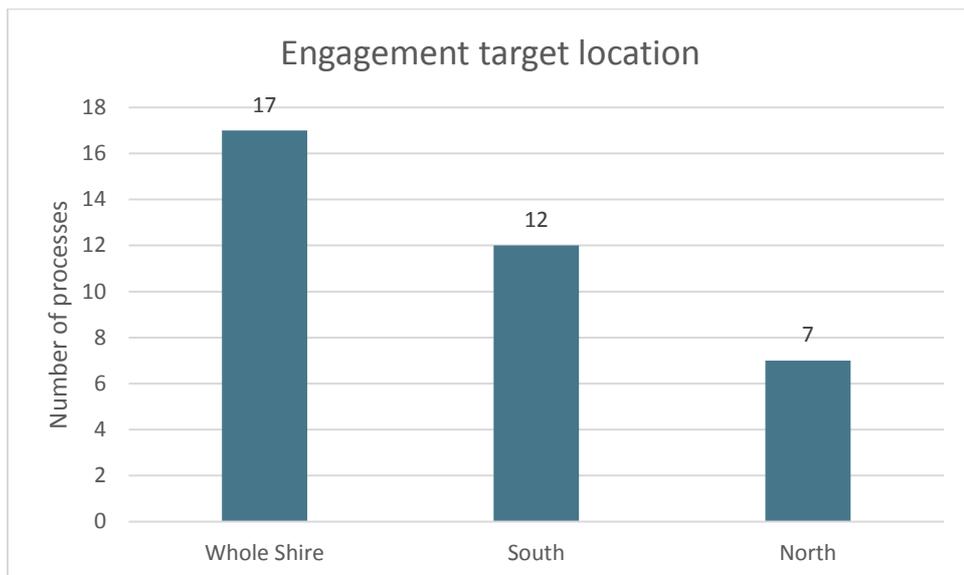
Source: ABS Census (2016)

Location

Of all engagement processes held from September 2016 – December 2017, almost 50% targeted the whole Shire for engagement, 30% targeted communities from the South, and 20% targeted communities from the North of the Shire (see chart below). This represents Council’s attempt to balance the needs of communities in the South who have a

¹⁵ Demographic representation has been analysed according to the audience and location *targeted* for each engagement project. It was not possible to analyse the demographics of actual participants, due to this data being recorded and analysed separately for each project, and different demographic information being collected for different engagement processes for privacy reasons.

higher population, with communities in the North who are smaller and more isolated and therefore may have additional support needs.



The low density and spread out nature of the Shire’s population means reaching all communities is an ongoing challenge for Council. Towns are targeted for engagement based on a project’s particular geographic focus (e.g. Inverleigh Structure Plan, or Garibaldi Public Art Panel), or on key service centres or community events where we hope to reach a range of community members from surrounding towns (e.g. conversation posts for the Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre held in Smythesdale and Bannockburn). In September 2016 - December 2017, individual engagement processes hosted activities or targeted participants from the following towns:¹⁶

- Bannockburn
- Dereel
- Garibaldi
- Haddon
- Inverleigh
- Linton
- Meredith
- Napoleons
- Rokewood
- Ross Creek
- Smythesdale
- Teesdale
- Woady Yaloak
- Napoleons.

Good practice example

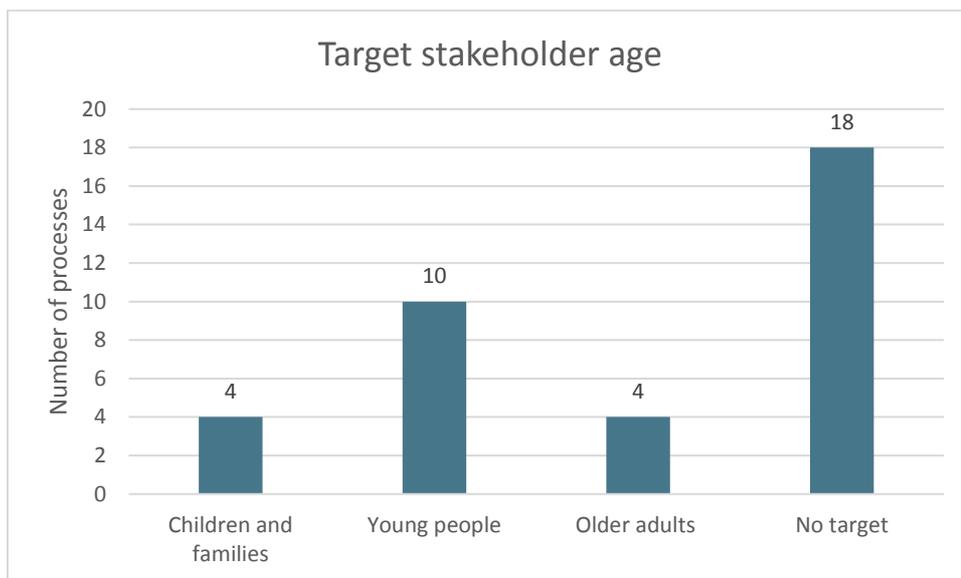
Selection of the Council Plan (2017-2021) Community Reference Group aimed to ensure representation from a demographic spread of the Shire. Council invited Expressions of Interest from 250 randomly selected ratepayers and community group members, as well as over 100 residents who had self-nominated an interest in the Council Plan survey. Council received 36 Expressions of Interest. An independent consultant then selected group members based on geographic location, gender, and age group, to ensure the group reflected the demographics of the broader community. 25 group members were selected at this stage. Due to initial under-representation from people living in Bannockburn aged 16-45, Council targeted recruitment to these sections of the community. This was done through

¹⁶ This list does not including the Community Planning Annual Review which met with 21 out of the [23 participating towns](#).

flyers and social media posts at our Bannockburn Children and Family Services Centre, and through networks of Council staff members.

Age

Approximately half of all engagement processes targeted specific age groups, with 10% targeting children and families, 30% targeting young people aged 12-25, and 8% targeting older adults. The other half of all processes did not provide targeted recruitment processes or methods for specific age groups, and is therefore likely that they primarily involved the general adult population (see chart below). Although processes specifically targeting older adults are slightly lower than the Shire’s demographic representation, anecdotal data suggests that Shire-wide projects often engaged more effectively with older community members due to the overall higher rates of volunteerism amongst this age group.



Area for improvement

While overall number of engagement processes focused on children, youth, and families reflects the Shire’s demographics, these engagements were mainly focused on programs and services specifically for these age groups (e.g. FReeZA youth committees, Early Years’ Service Review), with the exception of the Bannockburn Heart Play Space engagement. A number of projects which affect all age groups (such as the Council Plan 2017-21 and some strategic planning projects) did not have specific engagement methods targeted to children or young people. Council staff who deliver engagements have themselves recognised engaging with children and young people as an area for skill development. This is important because Council has an obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989) which states that all children and young people have a right to participate in matters affecting their lives.

Some methods used for Shire-wide projects may also unintentionally excluding children and young people. For example, surveys posted out to households are likely to be filled in by parents in households with families; workshops held in the evening suit adults after work hours but not necessarily older people or children and young people; and community reference groups can operate in adult-centric ways through their use of agendas, minutes, and formal facilitation. In addition, no engagement opportunities provided child care which may limit some parents’ involvement.

Recommendation 3.1: Community Engagement Officer to work with the Youth Development Team and Early Years Services in 2018 to plan and deliver professional development and resources to staff to enhance their confidence and skills in engaging with children and young people.

Recommendation 3.2: Community Engagement Officer to continue to encourage staff running Shire-wide engagements relevant to children and young people to use targeted strategies for these groups, and to consider offering child care for significant engagement processes relevant to families.

Good practice examples

There are a number of excellent examples of engagement processes which used targeted and effective methods for engaging with specific demographic groups, including the Bannockburn Heart Play Space engagement (see case study below) and the Walk to School 'Walkshop' with children; the Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow with young people (see case study in Section 2.1); and the Inverleigh Flood Study with older residents (see below under 'Accessible engagement').

Case Study: Bannockburn Heart Play Space Field Trip

29 students from Bannockburn Primary School (grades 3-6) attended a field trip to Hadfield Park in Wallan, a play space with similar elements to those proposed for the new Bannockburn Heart in August 2017. Information about students' favourite elements of the play space was gained through staff observation of their play (who played on what, for how long), and written and verbal surveys.

How the process demonstrated best practice

- *Targeted relevant stakeholders:* By engaging directly with the local primary school, the project ensured it involved children who will be one of the key user-groups for the play space. This ensured feedback was relevant, and that the project will meet the community's needs and aspirations.
- *Appropriate method:* The method was appropriate to engaging with children as it was done in a familiar setting (school field trip), with trusted adults (teachers), and a group of peers, and used an activity they could feel confident in – i.e. playing! The students selected to participate were also identified as school leaders by the school who would enjoy participating in the engagement. This approach decreased the potential risk of children feeling uncomfortable or disempowered in the engagement.
- *Empowering children and young people:* Students were amazed and excited that Council staff were interested in their opinions and feedback – even negative feedback! Council staff were also impressed with the quality of ideas and thoughtfulness displayed by the students.

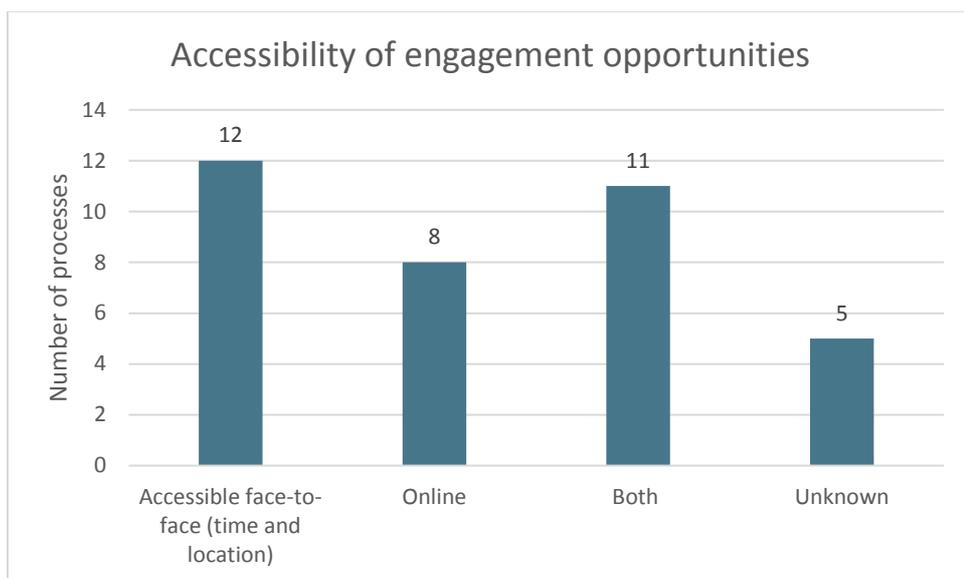


Image: school leaders from Bannockburn Primary on the Bannockburn Heart Play Space engagement field trip 2017

2.3.2 Accessible and inclusive engagement

Council is committed to ensuring that all community members have a fair and reasonable opportunity to participate in engagement activities. Over 85% of all engagement processes (31/36) in September 2016 – December 2017 provided some opportunities which were accessible to people with work, study, or family commitments. This is important as the majority of residents commute outside the Shire for work and study, and are therefore not

available in person during Council’s regular hours of operation. Accessible engagement activities included online engagement (19 processes), and face-to-face activities held at accessible times and locations (23 processes) such as running workshops after work hours, holding conversation posts on weekends at community markets, or making an engagement activity for children and young people part of a school field trip. See chart below for details.



Case Study: Inverleigh Flood Study High Tea

The Inverleigh Flood Study aimed to provide a detailed assessment of where flooding might impact on residents and properties in the Inverleigh township. To ensure the accuracy of new flood maps, project managers invited local residents to share their stories and photographs of previous flooding events in Inverleigh. Project managers were particularly interested in engaging with older residents of the town who had personal experience of major flooding events in the 1970s. While all residents were welcome to attend a public workshop held on a weekday evening, a specific afternoon high tea was organised for older residents, as it was acknowledged that many senior residents were less likely to attend public forums in the evenings.

Engaging older residents in small towns requires a personal approach. Council staff worked with the local progress association to identify people who had lived in the town for many years. A personal invitation to a high tea afternoon was hand delivered to each resident on the list. Arrangements were made for residents to assist each other with transport where necessary. All 14 residents who were invited attended the high tea. The engagement was a great success as community members enjoyed the opportunity to share their memories and photos, and a range of relevant data was collected which improved the quality of the Study.

How the process demonstrated best practice

- *Appropriate methods:* The method was appropriate to engaging with older residents as it used the familiar setting of a high tea, and was held in the afternoon as some older residents are reluctant to go out at night.
- *Targeted recruitment:* Experience has shown that traditional methods of promotion and recruitment such as website, social media, and post are less likely to be successful with older residents. For this reason, a Council staff member personally invited the residents by going to their homes and knocking on the door to explain the project and the engagement opportunity.
- *Accessible and inclusive engagement:* The small number of participants and use of individual conversations also assisted older residents who may struggle with hearing impairments. Arranging transport assistance where necessary also helped to ensure that all community members had the chance to participate.



- **Empowering older residents:** This process empowered older residents by respecting the particular value of their knowledge and experiences. It also provided them with an opportunity to use this expertise to contribute to the safety and wellbeing of their community.

Using an outreach approach

Council has made an effort to link engagement activities to existing community meetings, events, or spaces. This outreach approach aims to decrease the burden on community members’ valuable time and energy, and to increase participation by reaching community members who may not typically volunteer to participate in Council-run activities. A total of 40% of all engagement opportunities utilised existing opportunities (see chart below). Please see Table 3 for examples of this outreach approach.

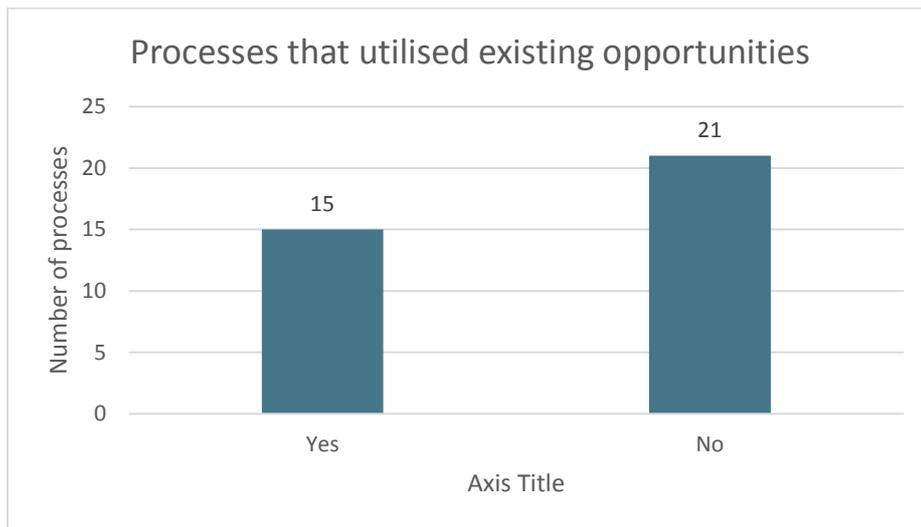


Table 3: Engagement outreach examples

Existing opportunity	Engagement activity
Community group meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan 2017-21 workshop at Planned Activity Group meeting • Community Planning annual review at Community Coordinator meetings
Community spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bannockburn Heart voting at child care, and library • Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow workshops at secondary schools • Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre (GPCCC) project conversation posts at Bannockburn Plaza and The Well Smythesdale • Inverleigh Structure plan on town high street
Community events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Plan 2017-21 conversation posts at community markets • Economic Development and Tourism Strategy conversation post at Golden Plains Farmers Market • Early Years Services conversation post at Children’s Week event

Area for improvement

Data suggests that this outreach approach is highly successful in engaging more participants, and feedback from community members suggests this is often their preferred option for engagement, as it does not require attendance at additional events in their already busy schedules. However, while Council recognises the benefits to this approach there are a number of challenges to adopting this approach more broadly across Council departments. These include:

- Engaging through existing groups and events is more resource intensive for staff and consultants who have to plan and attend multiple community group meetings rather than hold one specific engagement opportunity to bring all relevant stakeholders together
- Finding staff who are able to work evenings and weekends can be difficult due to existing personal commitments
- Often community events and meetings are not held regularly, and tight timeframes for planning engagements often mean that Council timelines do not align with existing opportunities in the community
- Limited internal communication and coordination between Council departments means staff may not know about existing opportunities to meet with target stakeholders.

It is hoped that plans for 2018 to continue to improve planning for engagement processes, and internal coordination and collaboration will lead to an increase in Council staff members utilising existing opportunities for their engagement activities. Please see section 2.4 for more details about these initiatives.

Recommendation 3.3: New Community Engagement Policy to include an underlying principle that engagement processes include all community members who are affected by the decision, and provide the required support for diverse groups to be involved.

Recommendation 3.4: Community Engagement Officer to continue to provide support and advice for staff to increase proportion of engagement processes that utilise existing opportunities in the community.

Including community members with disabilities

Council's Rural Access Worker regularly sends information about open engagement opportunities to Council's Access and Inclusion Committee, made up of community members with disabilities, their carers, and advocates. A number of engagement processes were proactive in ensuring community members with disabilities could participate, including providing transport assistance and printed information (e.g. the Council Plan (2017-2021) and the Inverleigh Flood Study).

In 2017, the Community Engagement Officer and Rural Access Worker collaborated on an accessible engagement checklist for staff planning face-to-face engagement activities, to enhance the inclusion of community members with disabilities. Council aims to promote this checklist internally in 2018 as part of our broader Access and Inclusion Plan.

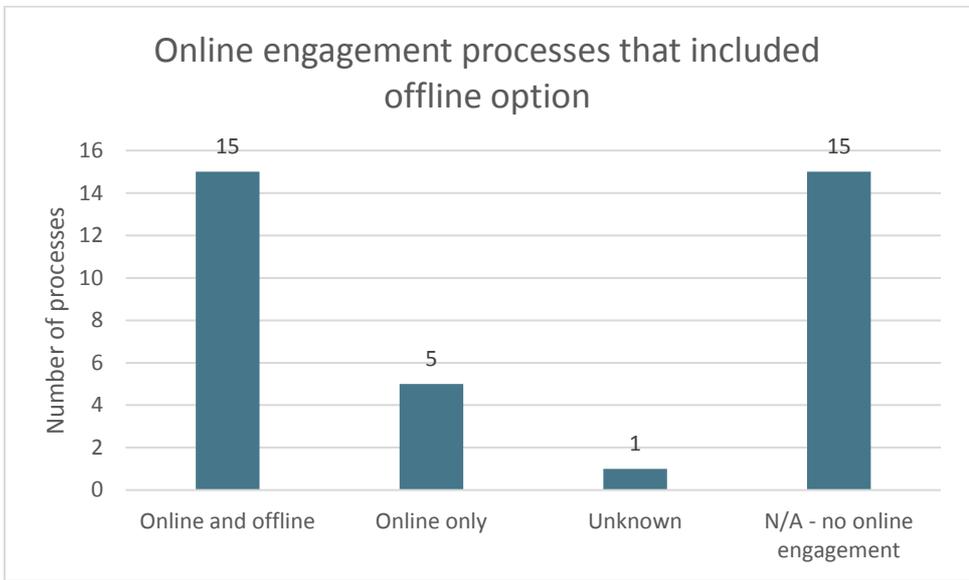
Area for improvement

While there is evidence of increasing consideration of community members with disabilities in planning engagement processes, the experience of the Community Engagement Officer suggests this is not consistently applied. In addition, many staff are not aware of the accessibility checklist.

Recommendation 3.5: Community Engagement Officer to promote the Access and Inclusion Committee and accessible engagement checklist with staff, and to work with the Aged and Disability team to explore how to continue to enhance the accessibility and inclusion of engagement opportunities.

Offline options for online engagement

As outlined in section 2.2, online methods are essential in Golden Plains Shire to ensure engagement is accessible. At the same time, Council recognises the importance of continuing to provide written and face-to-face options for the many residents who are not comfortable using the internet, or have poor or no internet access. For this reason, 70% of all engagement processes with an online component (15/21) also provided an offline option (e.g. hard copy, or face-to-face) (see chart below).



Conversation posts

One example of accessible engagement opportunities are pop-up conversation posts, which are a proactive and informal way for Council to engage with the community about our events, projects and programs. From September 2016 – December 2017, Council engaged with over 1,000 community members at 18 conversation posts, held at community spaces and events across the Shire (for more details see Appendix 1: Project Table; Appendix 4: Review of conversation post pilot). In 2017, Council developed branded materials including a gazebo and flags to increase our visibility at community events. Guidelines and a resource kit were also developed for staff, in order to improve the frequency and quality of conversation posts offered to the community.



Image: Cr Joanne Gilbert with Community Engagement Officer Susan Firth-McCoy at Conversation Post at Smythesdale Country Market

Overall benefits of conversation posts (see Appendix 4 for more details):

- **Increased positive interactions between community members, Council staff, and Councillors** due to the informal and proactive nature of the Conversation Posts. Community feedback has included: “It’s great to see Council out in the community”; and “Thanks for listening”.
- **Improved public perception of Council.** Even when community members did not have specific contributions related to the project in question, they have commented on how much they appreciated Council’s presence in the community and the opportunity to engage.
- **Improved transparency of engagement and decision-making processes,** particularly when Councillors and SMT attended. Community members were able to speak directly with decision-makers (e.g. Council Plan (2017-2021), and Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre).
- **Increased participation and reach** by engaging with community members who may not typically volunteer to participate in Council-run activities (such as Council meetings, workshops, or ‘town hall’ briefings). Most conversation posts had a much greater participation rate than other public methods such as ‘town hall’ meetings due to connecting with an existing audience.
- **Decreased the burden on community members** by engaging at existing community meetings, events, or spaces.

Overall challenges

- Finding staff and managers who are able to work evenings and weekends can be difficult due to existing personal commitments.
- Can be resource-intensive for low participation rates if location, time, or event is inappropriate for the topic.
- Limited involvement from Councillors and Senior Managers can make it difficult for Officers to respond to community questions and complaints outside their area of expertise.
- Community members may not have enough advance warning to enable maximum participation when conversation posts are ad-hoc and project-based, as opposed to a regular calendar of conversation posts.

Key Learnings

- Success is highly dependent on choosing an appropriate location for each topic, and the skills of individual staff members to engage positively with community members.
- Conversation posts are not appropriate for engagements that require in-depth reflection, as there is not enough time to give lots of information and community members don’t have the chance to talk to each other.
- Conversation posts may not be the most appropriate method if the engagement aims to reach a representative group of community members, as holding enough posts across the Shire to reach a representative audience is likely to be highly resource-intensive.

Area for improvement

A small number of respondents from the Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey (2017) (2/400) stated that they would like to see a further increase in Council staff and Councillors engaging at community events:

“Executives and Council members need to get out and meet the rate payers, and be more open. Get out and be seen asking questions to ratepayers.”

“Get out and talk to people, get a better understanding of the needs of the community.”

Recommendation 3.6: Explore developing a regular calendar of conversation posts, attended by Councillors and Senior Managers, held at least four times per year to provide a predictable opportunity for accessible engagement; while continuing to hold conversation posts organised by individual teams on an as-needs basis.

Measuring our progress over the next 12 months

- Improved staff knowledge and skills in engaging with children and young people
- Increased number of Shire-wide projects that use targeted approaches to engaging with children, young people and families
- Increase proportion of engagement processes using an outreach approach i.e. utilising existing opportunities in the community
- Enhanced staff knowledge and skills in engaging with community members with disabilities, and evidence of increased use of appropriate methods for recruitment and engagement
- Increased numbers of conversation posts and participants, and increased diversity of settings used
- Evidence of a regular calendar of conversation posts attended by Councillors and senior managers.

2.4 Effective planning and management

Principles and goals

What's important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be more proactive than reactive • A coordinated approach to communications and engagement across departments • More consistency in practice across Council departments • Engage earlier in the process (both with community members and decision-makers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement processes are coordinated and consistent across Council departments • Cross-departmental sharing of information is regular practice • Council policies are aligned with engagement principles • Projects reflect the application of best practice principles and framework • Good planning of the engagement process – including identifying the resources, people, and time required • Continual quality improvement through monitoring and evaluation of community engagement processes • Early and effective engagement with decision-makers

Source: Community Engagement Strategy 2016-2020: Part A

Summary

Achievements

- Broad range of Council departments (12 in total) engaged with the community, with evidence of increasing coordination and collaboration across departments
- New Community Engagement Practice Framework (draft) developed
- New internal engagement management software developed to improve consistency, documentation, and coordination of engagement across the organisation (planned launch in March 2018)
- Range of new resources and tools developed for staff, and stored on a dedicated Community Engagement page on Council's new staff intranet
- 90% of all public engagement processes received some level of advice or support from the Community Engagement Officer
- New induction program in community engagement commenced for all new staff
- New staff peer-support network commenced for community engagement practitioners
- New regional network initiated with other community engagement officers from neighbouring Councils
- Councillors and senior managers directly participated in a number of major engagement activities across the Shire.

Areas for improvement

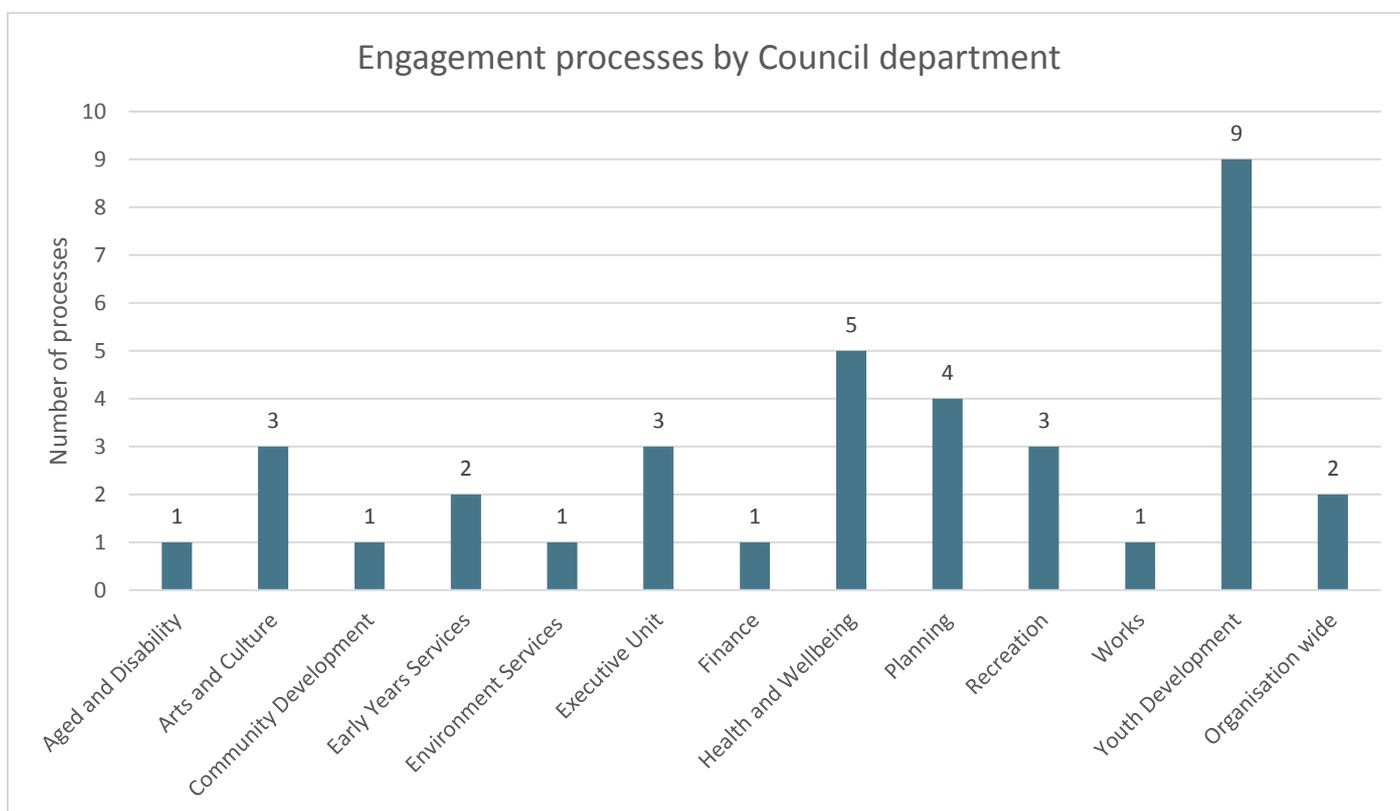
- Lack of coordination in engagement processes across Council departments
- Significant inconsistency across the organisation in planning for engagement, documentation, and evaluation of engagement processes
- A number of policies and resources are still in draft form, and many staff are not aware of the new resources and tools now available to support engagement practice
- Only 25% of public engagement processes involved the Community Engagement Officer at the planning stage, which limited quality assurance and consistency
- There is inconsistency in understanding of, and commitment to engagement across the organisation, caused in part by the lack of an embedded culture which consistently promotes community engagement

Detailed review of progress

Effective planning and management of community engagement processes is essential to upholding the rights of all community members to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. The Victorian Auditor General's Office [Better Practice Guide](#) (2015) outlines how councils are required to consistently demonstrate responsive, transparent, and accountable community engagement including appropriate design, documentation, monitoring and evaluation.

2.4.1 Coordinated and consistent engagement practice across Council departments

Community engagement is a whole of Council responsibility, and 12 areas of Council engaged with the community from September 2016 – December 2017 (see Section 2.1 for more details). For the first time in Council's history, two large scale projects in 2017 involved representatives from all of Council's four directorates in planning and delivering extensive engagement processes (Council Plan 2017-2021, Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre).¹⁷ This demonstrates the commitment to engagement across the organisation as a whole, and evidence of increasing coordination and collaboration. A small number of other processes were run in partnership with multiple Council departments, including the Bannockburn Heart Play Space (Recreation, Works, Youth Development); the Arts Trail Evaluation (Arts and Culture, Executive Unit); and the Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow (Youth Development, Early Years).



Area for improvement

Coordination is an ongoing challenge at Council, with examples of different departments engaging with the same community, at the same time, without being aware of each other's work; or asking the same questions that community members have been asked before. This can be understandably frustrating for community members and can lead to 'consultation fatigue' where community members are less motivated to volunteer their time and energy to participate in future. A number of actions outlined below aim to improve coordination, including the new engagement management software, and staff practitioner network.

¹⁷ Council's four directorates include: Corporate Services, Executive Unit, Community Services, Assets and Amenity.

2.4.2 Policies and procedures

While the Community Engagement Strategy provides the overall direction for engagement, policies and procedures are required to make it clear how to apply the strategic directions in practice, and to ensure consistency and accountability for engagement across the organisation.

In 2017, Council developed a new **Community Engagement Practice Framework (draft)**, which outlines our core engagement principles, and six-steps which guides staff through the entire process of planning, implementing and evaluating engagement processes. The Framework responds to the community's priorities outlined in the Strategy, and aligns with the [new Local Government Act](#) (draft 2018) community engagement principles. It incorporates local and international best practice guidelines, including the VAGO elements of better practice (VAGO [Better Practice Guide](#) 2015), and IAP2 [Quality Assurance Standard](#) (2015). The Framework will be finalised and promoted internally by mid-2018.

Recommendation 4.1: Promote the new Community Engagement Practice Framework in new staff inductions, and new introductory training for all staff (see Recommendation 4.12), and through briefings to both the Full Management Team, and Council.

Recommendation 4.2: Explore how to incorporate new Community Engagement Practice Framework into organisation-wide planning systems.

Recommendation 4.3: Incorporate the new Community Engagement Practice Framework's community engagement principles into position descriptions for all staff. Review our recruitment for staff with engagement functions and include engagement skills and experience in Key Selection Criteria where required.

Council has a current **Community Engagement Policy** (2014), which will be reviewed and updated in 2018 to ensure it is in line with the Strategy and contemporary best-practice principles.¹⁸

Recommendation 4.4: Ensure the new Community Engagement Policy aligns with the new Local Government Act (2018) engagement principles, and VAGO (2015) best-practice guidelines.

Recommendation 4.5: Explore the need for a Community Engagement Standard Operating Procedure to standardise the use of the Community Engagement Practice Framework, as well as all required systems, tools and processes.

Good practice example

The Council Plan (2017-21) Steering Group and consultants Mach2 conducted a rigorous evaluation of the Council Plan engagement process. This included a survey and focus group discussion with Community Reference Group members, a staff survey, and a workshop with the internal steering group. The findings will be used to inform future Shire-wide engagement processes, and the approach will be used as an example for other staff to learn from.

Ensuring best-practice and continuous quality improvement

Despite the importance of policies and frameworks, they are insufficient to ensure effective community engagement practice.

¹⁸ Reviewing the Community Engagement Policy was an action for 2016-17 in the Strategy Action Plan, however this was not achieved within this timeframe due to competing priorities, and staff changeover within the organisation.

Area for improvement

The experience of the Community Engagement Officer suggests that there is significant inconsistency in planning for engagement, limited documentation of engagement processes, and very little evidence of evaluation across the organisation. This parallels the experience of other Councils across the State, as demonstrated by VAGO's [community engagement audits of six local councils' \(2017\)](#). This audit found that while most audited councils had policies and frameworks informed by best-practice models, implementation of the policies was inconsistent. In addition, most councils did not document their engagement plans, and none of the councils evaluated their engagement processes, or documented recommendations for improvement. As VAGO found, lack of good planning and project management meant councils were "unable to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of their public participation exercises" (2017, p. ix).

A number of actions from the Strategy aim to ensure that not only do we have best-practice policies and procedures, but that these are followed and documented, and that continuous quality improvement is applied across the organisation. These actions are outlined below, including new systems, resources, and tools; and staff capacity building through ongoing advice and support from the Community Engagement Officer, and staff training and professional development.

2.4.3 Systems and resources

New engagement management software

One innovative approach to supporting engagement practice at Council is the development of new internal engagement management software, the 'Community Engagement Manager System', which is planned to launch in March 2018. The software was developed by the Community Engagement Officer, and aligns with the new Practice Framework (draft) described above. The software content was reviewed by 18 staff from across 10 departments, in staff workshops in August 2017, to ensure the software meets the needs of the organisation.¹⁹ These workshops also resulted in the development of hard copy planning and evaluation templates, available on the staff intranet, which are being used in the interim while the software is being developed. The software aims to improve engagement practice across a number of areas, including:

- Ensure the new Community Engagement Practice Framework is effectively and consistently applied
- Provide a coordinated system for tracking community engagement processes and storing information
- Improve accountability and quality improvement by ensuring engagement processes are documented and evaluated
- Improve coordination and collaboration of engagement processes across the organisation
- Assist in monitoring and evaluating the organisation's overall performance in community engagement

The software is hosted on the staff intranet made up of 2 components: an online form and a dashboard, which are outlined below in Table 4.

¹⁹ Three workshops were held with staff from the following Council departments: Youth Development, Community Development, Recreation, Economic Development, Communications and Marketing, Health and Wellbeing, Aged and Disability, Early Years, Environment Services, Planning

Table 4: Community Engagement Manager System functionality

Software component	Functionality
Dashboard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set and monitor due dates for each engagement process • Search for other past , current, and planned engagement processes
Online form	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the engagement plan, results of engagement, and the evaluation • Access relevant resources and tools for each stage of the process • Upload relevant files • Download pdf reports of the online form

Recommendation 4.6: All staff involved in community engagement practice to attend training in the new internal engagement management software, to improve consistency in planning, documentation, and evaluation of engagement practices

Recommendation 4.7: All staff managing engagement processes to be required to use the internal engagement management software to manage all engagement processes, and managers have the final responsibility for ensuring all engagements are recorded using the software. These requirements to be outlined the new Community Engagement Policy or Standard Operating Procedure.

Resources and tools for staff

A range of new tools and resources have been created since September 2016 to support community engagement practice, and are stored on a dedicated Community Engagement page on Council’s new staff intranet to ensure they are easily accessible for all staff. An overview of resources is provided to new staff during community engagement inductions. Some of these resources include:

- Planning template
- Monitoring and evaluation template
- Poster template
- Workshop facilitation tips and running sheet
- Customer service request form
- Towns and districts for sampling
- Engagement methods definitions
- Conversation Post guidelines and recording

Area for improvement

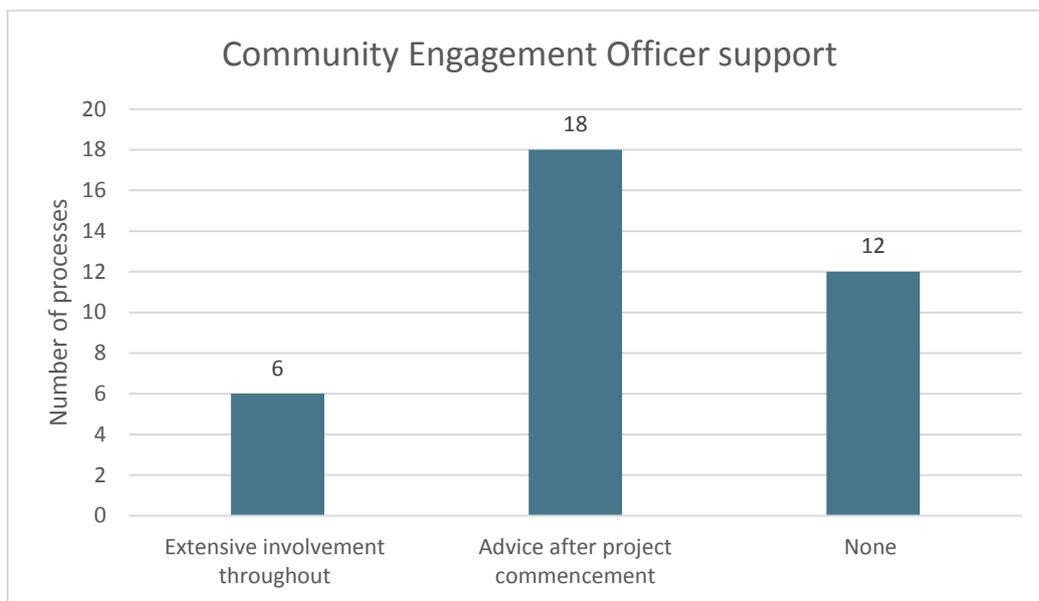
While some staff are utilising these resources, anecdotal evidence suggests many staff are not aware of the resources now available.

Recommendation 4.8: Community Engagement Officer to consolidate all staff resources into a single handbook, and use resources in staff community engagement training to increase utilisation of resources.

2.4.4 Staff capacity building

Advice and support from the Community Engagement Officer

Council takes a de-centralised approach to engagement due to the number of engagement processes that occur across the organisation, and the diverse areas of expertise in local government. Hence the Community Engagement Officer does not focus on delivering engagements, but on providing tailored advice and support to staff and consultants who manage engagement processes. In 2017, the Community Engagement Officer was involved with over 90% of all public engagement processes (21/23). Only a small number of engagements with Council program participants (3/13) involved the Community Engagement Officer. However these projects are less likely to need advice and support due to having a more defined target audience and staff members running these engagements having existing skills in engagement and evaluation.



Area for improvement

Only 25% of public engagement processes (6/23) involved the Community Engagement Officer at the planning stage, which limited quality assurance and consistency in areas of engagement design, principles, and practice. It also limited the coordination of engagement processes as the Community Engagement Officer is able to inform staff about other relevant processes occurring across the organisation.

Recommendation 4.9: Managers to ensure the Community Engagement Officer is informed about all public community engagement processes during the planning phase; preferably by ensuring the process is recorded promptly in the new internal engagement management software. All staff managing large-scale or high-risk engagement processes to seek advice early from the Community Engagement Officer, including sending any brief for consultants to the Community Engagement Officer for review.

Recommendation 4.10: Community Engagement Officer to work with procurement staff to develop standardised wording for briefs written for engagement consultants, and to inform the rating system to ensure only quality consultants are used.

Staff inductions

A new community engagement induction program for all new staff was developed in late 2017, which outlines key engagement principles, what is important to the community, what success looks like in engagement, the role of the Community Engagement Officer, and resources and tools available to support staff.

Staff training

Staff training on 'Positive interactions with community' was facilitated by community engagement expert Jen Lilburn from Kismet Forward in October – December 2017 (please see Section 2.1: 'Genuine engagement' for more details). Further training for staff is planned in 2018 around engagement design, engagement methods and facilitation, and data analysis and reporting.

Recommendation 4.11: As part of an ongoing internal professional development program, all staff involved in community engagement practice across the organisation are required to attend 3 training sessions: introduction to engagement, engagement design, and methods and facilitation.

Staff practitioner network

A voluntary peer-support network for staff involved in community engagement practice was started in late 2017. The network aims to provide opportunities for staff to reflect on their engagement practice, learn from peers, and build their skills and knowledge. The practitioner network is also one way Council hopes to improve coordination and collaboration in engagement across the organisation. The group plans to meet every 2-3 months to share ideas and case studies; work together to plan upcoming engagements; hear from internal and external presenters; and advise the Community Engagement Officer.

Recommendation 4.12: Community Engagement Officer to work with managers to create incentives for staff to engage in best-practice community engagement, including exploring an annual staff engagement award, and opportunities to attend community engagement forums and professional development opportunities.

Monitoring best-practice in the field of community engagement

The Community Engagement Officer regularly attends relevant training, forums and network meetings to ensure the organisation stays up-to-date with developments in the field of engagement. In 2017, the Community Engagement Officer also initiated a new regional network with other neighbouring Councils (including Geelong, Moorabool, Surf Coast, Ballarat, Wyndham and Melton), which meets bi-monthly. This group aims to improve effective and efficient engagement practice across our region, by sharing knowledge and resources among community engagement professionals working in local government.

2.4.5 Involving organisational leaders and decision-makers

During 2017, the Community Engagement Officer met individually with 80% of team leaders (15/19) (or their managers where more appropriate) across the organisation to share information about legislative requirements, best practice principles, and new staff resources. The Community Engagement Officer also attended team leader meetings to share updates and find out about new engagement processes across the organisation. In 2017, the full management team had some initial discussions about how to enhance proactive engagement with senior managers and Councillors and the community, and how to effectively involve decision-makers early in the engagement process.

Councillors participated in a number of engagement activities across the Shire, including conversation posts and workshops for major projects including the Council Plan (2017-21) and Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre, and participation in Community Advisory Groups such as the Garibaldi Art Panel.

Area for improvement

There is significant evidence that we are improving in our community engagement practice across the organisation. However it is also clear that some areas of Council engage more than others, and there is significant inconsistency in the quality of engagement practice. The experience of the Community Engagement Officer suggests that a fundamental issue is that there is not a common understanding of, or commitment to, engagement across the organisation. The Strategy aims to be a document that guides the organisation as a whole in community engagement, including staff, managers and Councillors. However in practice, the implementation of the Strategy has primarily been the responsibility of the Community Engagement Officer, which limits the effectiveness and reach across the organisation.

The Community Engagement Officer has a number of current and planned actions to enhance knowledge and commitment to engagement across the organisation, as outlined throughout this report. However achieving true excellence in community engagement requires organisational leaders to create a culture of community engagement, in recognition that engagement is fundamental to achieving our primary objective in local government, and to upholding community members' democratic and human rights.

Recommendation 4.13: Organisational leaders to endeavour to create a culture of community engagement, in recognition that community engagement is fundamental to our primary objective in local government. Councillors to consistently demonstrate their value of, and commitment to engagement; and CEO and managers to ensure that best-practice principles and practice are embedded in all areas of the organisation.

Recommendation 4.14: Community Engagement Officer and relevant managers to encourage staff managing engagement processes to invite Councillors to relevant face-to-face engagement opportunities such as workshops, project-specific conversation posts, field trips.

2.4.6 Building capacity in the community

The Strategy highlights the importance not only of improving engagement practice within Council, but also building the capacity of community groups and volunteers to engage with their own communities. In 2017 the Community Engagement Officer delivered training on creative engagement methods for young people who were coordinating the Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow.

Recommendation 4.15: Community Engagement Officer to work with the Volunteer Coordinator and Community Development Officer to develop and run engagement training for volunteers and community groups in 2019.

Measuring our progress over the next 12 months

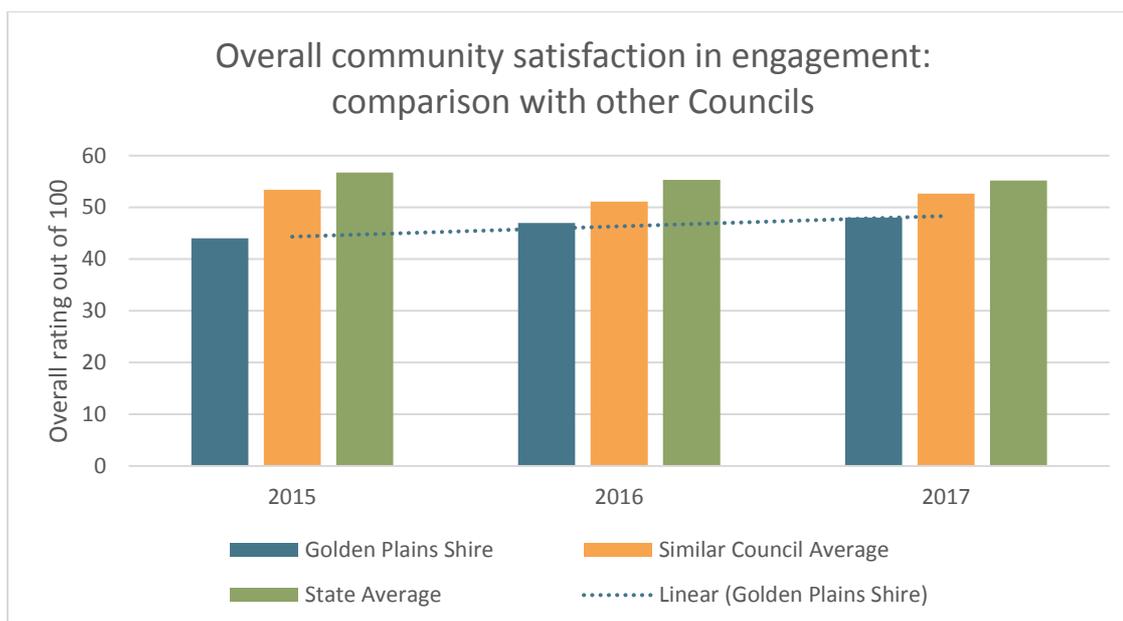
- Consistent use of new engagement management software by all relevant staff, and evidence from the software of improved coordination, planning, documentation, and evaluation
- Increased evidence of staff using resources and tools
- All staff involved in community engagement practice across the organisation attend 3 advanced engagement practice training sessions: introduction to engagement, engagement design, and methods and facilitation.
- Increased proportion of public engagement processes which involve the Community Engagement Officer at an early stage
- Increased involvement of Councillors and Senior Managers in relevant engagement processes.

2.5 Increased community satisfaction in engagement

Review of progress

Community satisfaction is one way in which we can measure our overall effectiveness in engagement. The annual Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey measures community views of Council's performance across a range of areas, including community engagement.

There has been an improvement in the community's satisfaction with Council's performance in community engagement since the adoption of the Community Engagement Strategy, with overall scores increasing from 44/100 in 2015 to 48/100 in 2017. More detailed analysis of the community's responses show that there has been slight overall increases in good and average ratings, and a significant decrease in poor ratings over this time period. This is in comparison to an overall trend of declining satisfaction across the State (57/100 in 2015 to 55/100 in 2017). Please see tables below for more details.

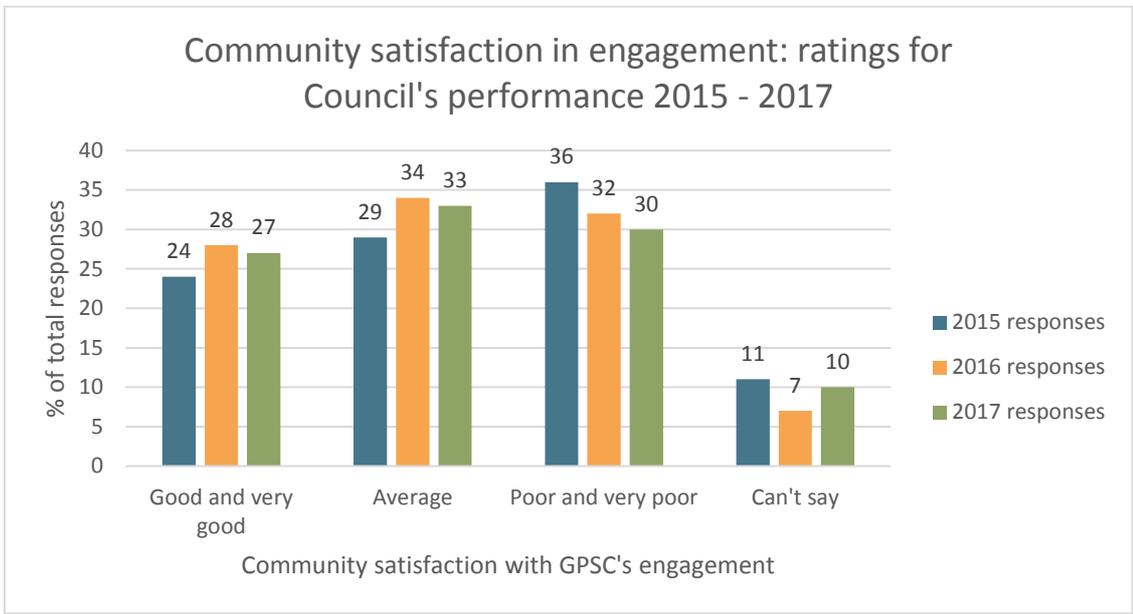


Source: Know Your Council website 2018 (<https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils/golden-plains/reports/governance>)

Areas for improvement

Despite this improvement, community satisfaction with engagement in Golden Plains Shire remains lower than average when compared with similar Shire councils, with a difference of over 4 percentage points in 2017, and 30% of residents feel our performance is 'poor' or 'very poor'. In response to the question, "What does Council need to do to improve their performance?", 1 in 6 people (60/400) made comments related to community engagement, which suggests there is still significant room for improvement.

Community feedback from the survey reflects similar themes to the feedback which informed the Strategy, which demonstrates the need to continue to address all four of the Strategy's key principles. Most of these comments related to the desire for more opportunities to participate, and for Council to improve responsiveness by listening more to what the community says. Some comments demonstrate that the community is not aware of some developments in our approach to engagement since the adoption of the Strategy, which means community satisfaction is likely to reflect both Council's actual performance, and our communication about what are doing.



Source: Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey: Golden Plains Shire Council (2017).

Recommendation 5.1: Community Engagement Officer to continue to work with Communications and Marketing team to explore the most effective ways of communicating Council engagement opportunities.

Nevertheless, almost 30% of residents rated our performance as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. However no open-ended questions were asked about what Council is doing well, so we do not have specific data about areas where the community feels we are performing well in engagement.

Recommendation 5.2: Gain feedback from community members following the publication of this report to gain further insight into community perceptions on our engagement performance, and appropriate actions to build on our strengths and improve on our weaknesses.

Recommendation 5.3: Consider including open-ended question about Council strengths in future community satisfaction surveys to assist Council to understand our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Consider including specific questions related to community engagement to help measure our effectiveness in achieving the Strategy’s objectives.

Part 3: Recommendations

A range of recommendations have been made throughout the report, and are collated below.

1. Genuine participation in decision making

- 1.1 Explore options for Council to implement more collaborative approaches, including deliberative processes for major projects over the next 3 years. If Council does commit to using a deliberative process, this must be adequately resourced to ensure it is effective and does not take away from all the other essential actions in building capacity in community engagement across the organisation
- 1.2 Provide key elements from 'Positive interactions with community' training as part of ongoing introductory community engagement staff training session (see section 2.4 for more details)
- 1.3 People and Culture unit to continue to work towards improved systems and clear standards for customer service across the organisation, to enhance responsiveness beyond formal engagement opportunities, including interactions with community members through our complaints and enquiries processes
- 1.4 Ensure the new Community Engagement Policy outlines when community engagement is required, encourages staff to use multiple methods, and mandates that engagement is always genuine, and uses an appropriate level of the IAP2 spectrum
- 1.5 Community Engagement Officer to continue to provide advice, training, and resources to increase:
 - community, staff and Councillor understanding of genuine and effective engagement
 - the number of engagement opportunities, participants and methods used
 - proportion of processes which use a higher level of the IAP2 spectrum (involve, collaborate, empower).

2. Transparency and the need for trust

- 2.1 Managers to take responsibility for ensuring all engagement processes are transparent by communicating openly with the community about the engagement and decision-making processes, and the influence of the community feedback on the final outcome
- 2.2 Community Engagement Officer to continue to highlight the importance of transparency, and share good practice examples through staff training, inductions, and individual advice and support
- 2.3 Community Engagement Officer to continue to work with the Communications and Marketing team to promote the Have Your Say platform through social media, the Gazette, the new community engagement e-newsletter, and other communications methods
- 2.4 Relevant staff members engaged in community engagement practice to attend training planned for 2018 in managing content on the Have Your Say site so that they can edit their own content to enhance timeliness and efficiency of communication
- 2.5 Communication and Marketing team to work with staff managing engagement projects to provide more specific information in Gazette articles about community engagement
- 2.6 Community Engagement Officer and the Communications and Marketing team to provide ongoing promotion of the new Community Engagement Register by including a link in every online survey, and through key communication channels (e.g. the Gazette, website, posters, local newsletters)
- 2.7 Community Engagement Officer to conduct a review of the Register in September 2017 (six months after the first newsletter has been sent) to evaluate its effectiveness
- 2.8 Managers to take responsibility for ensuring their staff 'close the loop' when informed by the Community Engagement Officer that their engagement processes are overdue for reporting back
- 2.9 The new Community Engagement Policy to mandate that engagement processes always use community feedback to influence our decision-making process, and always report back to community members on the outcomes (closing the loop).

3. Fairness and equity

- 3.1 Community Engagement Officer to work with the Youth Development Team and Early Years Services in 2018 to plan and deliver professional development and resources to staff to enhance their confidence and skills in engaging with children and young people
- 3.2 Community Engagement Officer to continue to encourage staff running Shire-wide engagements relevant to children and young people to use targeted strategies for these groups, and to consider offering child care for significant engagement processes relevant to families
- 3.3 New Community Engagement Policy to include an underlying principle that engagement processes include all community members who are affected by the decision, and provide the required support for diverse groups to be involved
- 3.4 Community Engagement Officer to continue to provide support and advice for staff to increase proportion of engagement processes that utilise existing opportunities in the community
- 3.5 Community Engagement Officer to promote the Access and Inclusion Committee and accessible engagement checklist with staff, and to work with the Aged and Disability team to explore how to continue to enhance the accessibility and inclusion of engagement opportunities
- 3.6 Explore developing a regular calendar of conversation posts, attended by Councillors and Senior Managers, held at least four times per year to provide a predictable opportunity for accessible engagement; while continuing to hold conversation posts organised by individual teams on an as-needs basis.

4. Effective planning and management

Policies and procedures

- 4.1 Promote the new Community Engagement Practice Framework in new staff inductions, and new introductory training for all staff (see Recommendation 4.12), and through briefings to both the Full Management Team, and Council
- 4.2 Explore how to incorporate new Community Engagement Practice Framework into organisation-wide planning systems
- 4.3 Incorporate the new Community Engagement Practice Framework's community engagement principles into position descriptions for all staff. Review our recruitment for staff with engagement functions and include engagement skills and experience in Key Selection Criteria where required
- 4.4 Ensure the new Community Engagement Policy aligns with the new Local Government Act (2018) engagement principles, and VAGO (2015) best practice guidelines
- 4.5 Explore the need for a Community Engagement Standard Operating Procedure to standardise the use of the Community Engagement Practice Framework, as well as all required systems, tools and processes.

Systems and resources

- 4.6 All staff involved in community engagement practice to attend training in the new internal engagement management software, to improve consistency in planning, documentation, and evaluation of engagement practices
- 4.7 All staff managing engagement processes to be required to use the internal engagement management software to manage all engagement processes, and managers have the final responsibility for ensuring all engagements are recorded using the software. These requirements to be outlined the new Community Engagement Policy or Standard Operating Procedure.
- 4.8 Community Engagement Officer to consolidate all staff resources into a single handbook, and use resources in staff community engagement training to increase utilisation of resources

Staff capacity building

- 4.9 Managers to ensure the Community Engagement Officer is informed about all public community engagement processes during the planning phase; preferably by ensuring the process is recorded promptly in the new internal engagement management software. All staff managing large-scale or high-risk engagement processes

to seek advice early from the Community Engagement Officer, including sending any brief for consultants to the Community Engagement Officer for review.

- 4.10 Community Engagement Officer to work with procurement staff to develop standardised wording for briefs written for engagement consultants, and to inform the rating system to ensure only quality consultants are used
- 4.11 As part of an ongoing internal professional development program, all staff involved in community engagement practice across the organisation are required to attend 3 training sessions: introduction to engagement, engagement design, and methods and facilitation
- 4.12 Community Engagement Officer to work with managers to create incentives for staff to engage in best-practice community engagement, including exploring an annual staff engagement award, and opportunities to attend community engagement forums and professional development opportunities.

Involving organisational leaders and decision-makers

- 4.13 Organisational leaders to endeavour to create a culture of community engagement, in recognition that community engagement is fundamental to our primary objective in local government. Councillors to consistently demonstrate their value of, and commitment to engagement; and CEO and managers to ensure that best-practice principles and practice are embedded in all areas of the organisation.
- 4.14 Community Engagement Officer and relevant managers to encourage staff managing engagement processes to invite Councillors to relevant face-to-face engagement opportunities such as workshops, project-specific conversation posts, field trips.

Building capacity of the community

- 4.15 Community Engagement Officer to work with the Volunteer Coordinator and Community Development Officer to develop and run engagement training for volunteers and community groups in 2019.

5. Increased community satisfaction in engagement

- 5.1 Community Engagement Officer to continue to work with Communications and Marketing team to explore the most effective ways of communicating Council engagement opportunities
- 5.2 Gain feedback from community members following the publication of this report to gain further insight into community perceptions on our engagement performance, and appropriate actions to build on our strengths and improve on our weaknesses
- 5.3 Consider including open-ended question about Council strengths in future community satisfaction surveys to assist Council to understand our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Consider including specific questions related to community engagement to help measure our effectiveness in achieving the Strategy's objectives.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Community Engagement Processes

Name	Council department	Location (activities or participants)	Methods	Date	Participant numbers
Activate the North: Participation in Northern recreation facilities	Recreation	Haddon Linton Ross Creek Woody Yaloak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey (online) 	Apr – Aug 2017	15
Aged Care Client Satisfaction Survey	Aged and Disability	Shire wide (phone)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey (phone) 	Sep 2017	25
An active community: Helping women and girls get active	Recreation	Shire wide (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey (online) 	Mar – Apr 2017	28
Bannockburn Bus Stop Redesign	Youth Development & Arts and Culture	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey (face-to-face) 	Jul – Aug 2017	20
Bannockburn Heart Play Space	Recreation & Works	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student field trip Conversation posts (x4) Online voting 	Aug – Sep 2017	332
Bannockburn High Street Beautification	Works	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation Post Survey (written at conversation post) Community group meetings and feedback form 	Jun – Sep 2017	90
Barwon South West Skate Competition	Youth Development	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee 	March 2017	10
Battle of the Bands	Youth Development	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee 	Sept 2016	10
Chat n Chew participant review	Health and Wellbeing	Haddon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey (written) 	July 2017	19
Community Centre Review	Health and Wellbeing	Haddon Dereel Bannockburn Smythesdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey (online and written) 	May – Jun 2017	101
Community Planning Annual Review	Community Development	21 of the 23 Community Planning towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group survey (face-to-face) Individual surveys (online and written) 	Mar– Aug 2017	40
Council Budget 2017-18	Finance	Shire wide (online and via post)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submissions (written and verbal) 	Apr – May 2017	11
Council Plan and Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan (2017 – 2021)	Organisation-wide	Bannockburn, Teesdale, Rokewood, Smythesdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conversation Posts x7 Survey (online and written) 	Nov 2016 – Jul 2017	380

		Shire wide survey (posted to all households)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community and stakeholder workshops x4 • Community Reference Group • Submissions (written and verbal) 		
Dogs and Cats in Golden Plains - Domestic Animal Management Plan	Environment Services	Shire wide (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (online) 	Sep- Nov 2017	281
Early Years in Golden Plains	Early Years Services	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversation Post 	Oct 2017	96
Early Years Services Review 2016	Early Years Services	Shire wide (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey 	Jul – Sep 2016	78
Economic development and Tourism Draft Strategy	Executive Unit	Bannockburn Shire-wide (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online feedback form • Conversation Post 	Oct 2017	29
Food Network participant review	Health and Wellbeing	Bannockburn, Smythesdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (written) 	July 2017	7
Garibaldi Public Art Panel	Arts and Culture	Garibaldi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisory Panel 	Mar 2017	2
Golden Plains Arts Trail 2017 Evaluation	Arts and Culture & Economic Development	Shire-wide (online and at all Arts Trail locations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (online and written) 	Apr –May 2017	142
Golden Plains Business Survey	Economic Development	Shire wide (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (online) 	Apr – May 2017	53
Golden Plains Community & Civic Centre Project	Organisation-wide	Bannockburn, Smythesdale, Shire wide (online and survey posted to all households)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (online and hard copy) • Focus groups x3 • Conversation posts x 4 • Stakeholder meetings re: master plan 	Sep – Dec 2017	144
Golden Youth Empowerment Roadshow	Youth Development	Dereel, Bannockburn, Geelong, Teesdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee members • Conversation Posts x5 • Surveys - online, verbal, written x4 • Workshops x8 	Aug – Nov 2017	1048
Inverleigh Flood Study	Planning	Inverleigh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops x3 • Online mapping tool 	Jul 2017 - ongoing	94
Inverleigh Structure Plan	Planning	Inverleigh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops x2 • Surveys • Conversation post 	Feb 2017 - ongoing	~220

Live at Turtle Bend	Youth Development	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee 	Nov 2016	5
Northern Settlement Strategy	Planning	Rokewood, Meredith, Haddon, Smythesdale, Napoleons, Linton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey • Drop-in sessions x7 	2016 – ongoing	194
Reducing plastic waste in Golden Plains	Executive Unit	Shire wide (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey 	May – Jul 2017	55
Roots Culture Festival	Youth Development	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee 	Feb 2017	5
Skate Park painting – Meredith and Inverleigh	Youth Development	Inverleigh, Meredith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face to face feedback 	Jan 2017	30
Teesdale Twilight Market	Youth Development	Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee 	Dec 2017	6
Trailblazers participant review	Health and Wellbeing	Smythesdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (written) 	Dec 2016	16
Updating the Municipal Strategic Statement and Local Planning Policy Framework	Planning	Dereel, Smythesdale, Bannockburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in sessions x3 • Submissions 	Nov-2016 – Jul 2017	~36
Walk to school ‘Walkshop’	Health and Wellbeing	Smythesdale, Linton, Woody Yaloak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop with students from 5 primary schools 	Apr 2017	33
Youth Logo	Youth Development	Shire wide (online), Smythesdale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online voting • Conversation Post 	July 2017	50
Youth Survey (Mission Australia)	Youth Development	Shire wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey (online and written) 	Jun – Aug 2017	65
TOTAL: 36	12				3,770

Appendix 2: Data sources and evidence used to review each of the Strategy's four key findings

Key principle	Data source	Evidence provided
1. Participation in decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's website and online engagement platform - Have Your Say • Information from Council staff and managers re: individual projects (verbal, and through written reports) • Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey results • Know your council • Evaluation data from individual community engagement processes • Google analytics? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of engagement activities • Numbers of participants • Methods used
2. Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's website and online engagement platform - Have Your Say • Information from Council staff and managers re: individual projects (verbal, and through written reports) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location of engagement activities • Stakeholders
3. Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council's bi-monthly publication the Gazette • Council's website and online engagement platform - Have Your Say • Council's social media accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessibility of information about engagement and decision-making processes • Communication with community about engagement opportunities and outcomes
4. Effective planning and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Engagement Officer's workplan • Internal communication (intranet, staff newsletter) • Staff meeting minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal communication and coordination

Appendix 3: Sources of Strategy principles and goals

The information under ‘Principles and goals’ at the start of each section was drawn from various parts of the Community Engagement Strategy Part A. Indicators of success were not organised according to the four key findings in the original document, but it was decided that reporting based on principles rather than strategic directions would be more meaningful for the community.

What’s important to the community was sourced from ‘What key findings underpin the Strategy’ (pp. 7-8), and ‘The Strategic Directions’ (pp. 12-13). *What success looks like* was sourced from ‘Our vision for community engagement’ (p. 9) and ‘The Strategic Directions’ (pp. 12-13).

Some new indicators of success were added where there was no indicator related to an issue of importance for the community in the original Strategy, and some have been reworded for clarity. The source of all indicators are detailed in the tables below. Please note: ‘SD’ stands for ‘Strategic Direction’, which are outlined on pp. 12-13 in the document.

2.1 Genuine participation in decision making

What’s important to the community	What success looks like - Sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More opportunities to contribute to Council’s decision making processes • Range of methods of engagement • More active participation opportunities (not just receiving information and filling in surveys – opportunity to speak with other community members) • Knowing that the engagement is genuine, not tokenistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater rates of participation in engagement activities (SD1, p. 12) • Multiple options to participate in the engagement processes (p. 9) • Effective two-way communication with clear and relevant information (p. 9) • Genuine engagement - using the community’s contribution to influence Council decisions (new) • Improved satisfaction with Council’s engagement processes (SD1, p. 12)

2.2 Transparency and the need for trust

What’s important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness and transparency of both the engagement and decision-making processes • Clear and timely communication about opportunities • Knowing that the input from consultations will be considered and not ignored • Demonstrate how community input has influenced the outcome • Report back: provide information to participants and broader community about the final decision (from ‘participation in decision making’, p. 7) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open communication and publicly accessible information about the engagement process and how this influenced the decision or outcome (new) • Timely communication that enables a reasonable opportunity for the community to give input to the engagement processes (p. 9 under fairness and equity) • Community has improved understanding of Council’s decision-making processes (SD1, p. 12) • More frequent demonstration of feedback on engagement outcomes being provided to key stakeholders and community (SD1, p. 12)

2.3 Fairness and equity

What's important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fair and reasonable opportunity to become involved Accessible and inclusive engagement opportunities for all who want to participate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better representation from diverse community and stakeholder groups across the Shire (SD1, p. 12) Appropriate time, venue, and location for those who are affected by, and interested in, the engagement (new)

2.4 Effective planning and management

What's important to the community	What success looks like
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be more proactive than reactive Engage earlier in the process (both with community members and decision-makers) A coordinated approach to communications and engagement across departments More consistency in practice across Council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good planning of the engagement process – including identifying the resources, people, and time required (p. 9) Early and effective engagement with decision-makers (SD2, p.12; SD5, p. 13) Engagement processes are coordinated and consistent across Council departments (SD2, p. 12) Cross-departmental sharing of information is regular practice (SD2, p. 12) Council policies are aligned with engagement principles (SD3, p. 13) Projects reflect the application of best practice principles and framework (SD3, p. 13) Continual quality improvement through monitoring and evaluation of community engagement processes (new)

Appendix 4: Review of conversation posts pilot 2017

About the pilot

Council ran a highly successful six month pilot of Conversation Posts in July - December 2017. Almost 1,000 community members engaged at 15 posts held across the Shire (see Table 1 for more details). Conversation Posts were organised by individual teams on an as-needs basis, at times and locations designed to best reach their target audience.

While Council had run some conversation posts prior to July 2017 for projects such as the Council Plan (2017-2021), the pilot led to a coordinated program which was promoted across Council, and supported by a range of resources and staff capacity building activities.

Table 1: Council conversation posts July – Dec 2017

Date	Topic	Staff / Councillors	Location / Event	Participants
July 2017	Youth Logo x1	Cr Gilbert, Community Engagement & Recreation staff	Smythesdale Country Market	26
July 2017	Bannockburn High Street Beautification x1	Works team & consultant	Golden Plains Farmers' Market Bannockburn	90
September 2017	Bannockburn Heart Play Space x4	Recreation Team, Works Team	Bannockburn Family Services Centre x2 The Library x2	128
September – October 2017	Youth Empowerment Roadshow x3	Youth Development Team & Youth Committee members	Triumph Event Clonard College (288) Dereel Community Event (42) Children's Week Event Bannockburn YMCA (184)	514
October 2017	Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre Redevelopment Project x4	SMT, Community Engagement, Executive Team, Cr Gilbert, Cr Evans, Cr Sharkey & Consultant	Smythesdale Country Market (22) The Well Smythesdale (9) Bannockburn Plaza (28) Golden Plains Farmers' Market (38)	97
October 2017	Draft Economic Development and Tourism Strategy x1	Executive Unit staff	Golden Plains Farmers' Market Bannockburn	28
October 2017	Early Years Services in GPS x1	Early Years staff	Bannockburn YMCA Children's Week	96
TOTALS	7 projects, 15 posts	6 Council departments	9 locations	979

Organisational support for Conversation Posts

The pilot was supported by a range of systems, resources, and training for staff. Staff feedback suggests this increased their motivation to hold a post and improved the efficiency of organising a post.

Resources:

- New branded materials including a gazebo and flags to increase our visibility at community events
- Resource kit including all stationery, recording templates, guidelines, survey response box, privacy notice, photographic notice

- Outlook calendar booking system
- Guidelines for staff to ensure consistency of conversation posts offered to the community
- Standard recording template to help staff capture consistent data
- Customer Service Request forms to ensure feedback and complaints on issues outside the focal topic are captured and followed up
- Safe Work Methods Statement.

Staff capacity building:

- Advice and support from Community Engagement Officer to staff planning conversation posts
- 27 staff and 7 managers trained in ‘having positive conversations with community’. Facilitated by Jen Lilburn from Kismet Forward in October – December 2017. Staff feedback indicated that the training increased confidence and skills in facilitating positive face-to-face engagement.

Review outcomes

Overall benefits of conversation posts

- **Increased positive interactions between community members, Council staff, and Councillors** due to the informal and proactive nature of the Conversation Posts. Community feedback has included: “It’s great to see Council out in the community”; and “Thanks for listening”.
- **Improved public perception of Council.** Even when community members did not have specific contributions related to the project in question, they have commented on how much they appreciated Council’s presence in the community and the opportunity to engage.
- **Improved transparency of engagement and decision-making processes,** particularly when Councillors and SMT attended. Community members were able to speak directly with decision-makers (e.g. Council Plan (2017-2021), and Golden Plains Community and Civic Centre).
- **Increased participation and reach** by engaging with community members who may not typically volunteer to participate in Council-run activities (such as Council meetings, workshops, or ‘town hall’ briefings). Most conversation posts had a much greater participation rate than other public methods such as ‘town hall’ meetings due to connecting with an existing audience.
- **Decreased the burden on community members** by engaging at existing community meetings, events, or spaces.

Overall challenges

- Finding staff and managers who are able to work evenings and weekends can be difficult due to existing personal commitments.
- Can be resource-intensive for low participation rates if location, time, or event is inappropriate for the topic.
- Limited involvement from Councillors and Senior Managers can make it difficult for Officers to respond to community questions and complaints outside their area of expertise.
- Community members may not have enough advance warning to enable maximum participation when conversation posts are ad-hoc and project-based, as opposed to a regular calendar of conversation posts.

Key Learnings

- Success is highly dependent on choosing an appropriate location for each topic, as there is no guarantee that community members will engage as they are unlikely to be attending the event or space with the specific purpose of engaging at the conversation post (see Table 2 for more details). The pilot originally planned to hold conversation posts at community markets in Smythesdale and Bannockburn. However experience from the pilot demonstrated that engagement in community spaces e.g. local shops and high streets can be highly effective, particularly for location-based projects. In addition, locations chosen based on the target audience were highly

effective, such as the Bannockburn Heart Play Space posts at the Family Services Centre and Library, and the Youth Roadshow held at regional schools and Bannockburn Children’s Week event.

- Success is reliant on skills of individual staff members to engage positively with community members. Posts must be well facilitated, and staff need to proactively invite participation, as most community members are unlikely to just come up and engage. Staff must also have the skills to respond positively to feedback and complaints unrelated to their engagement topic.
- Conversation posts are not appropriate for engagements that require in-depth reflection, as there is not enough time to give lots of information and community members don’t have the chance to talk to each other. Workshops, reference groups or deliberative methods are more appropriate methods for this purpose.
- Conversation posts may not be the most appropriate method if the engagement aims to reach a representative group of community members, as holding enough posts across the Shire, to reach a representative audience is likely to be highly resource-intensive. Surveys, or reference groups selected to be representative of Shire demographics are probably more appropriate methods for this purpose.

Table 2: Review of various location options

Location / event	Recommended for future use	Comments
Bannockburn Family Services Centre	Yes	Dependent on day time – important to run at drop off/ pick up times
Library	Yes	Dependent on day and time – important to link in with another existing activity
Local shops / high streets e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bannockburn Plaza - weekdays • Inverleigh High Street - weekend 	Yes	Highly successful – ability to capture a broad range of community members
Golden Plains Farmers’ Market	Yes	Good for visibility in the community
Smythesdale Country Market	Yes	Dependent on topic (should be highly relevant to the North). Relatively low overall attendance at the Market.
Children’s Week Event	Yes	Highly successful for engaging with children and families
The Well	No	Not appropriate due to people going for healthcare services or groups, low participation numbers

Recommendations

- Continue to hold regular conversation posts organised by individual teams on an as-needs basis, at times and locations designed to best reach their target audience.
- Explore a regular calendar of conversation posts attended by Councillors and Senior Managers, held at least four times per year.
- Hold conversation posts in a range of locations including community events, community spaces, and target to relevant location and audience. Explore other options such as school fetes and sporting events to reach diverse groups from across the community.

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