

Draft Communications Strategy

2022-2025



If you need this document in another format please contact Nillumbik Shire Council on 9433 3111.

Acknowledgement of Country

Nillumbik Shire Council respectfully acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people as the Traditional Owners of the Country on which Nillumbik is located, and we value the significance of the Wurundjeri people's history as essential to the unique character of the shire. We pay tribute to all First Nations People living in Nillumbik, give respect to Elders past, present and future, and extend that respect to all First Nations People.

We respect the enduring strength of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and acknowledge the ongoing impacts of past trauma and injustices from European invasion, massacres and genocide committed against First Nations People. We acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people hold a deep and ongoing connection to this place. We value the distinctive place of our First Nations People in both Nillumbik and Australia's identity; from their cultural heritage and care of the land and waterways, to their ongoing contributions in many fields including academia, agriculture, art, economics, law, sport and politics.

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Councillor Message

A joint message from all Councillors will be included once community feedback has been incorporated and Strategy finalised.

Why do we need a whole-of-council Communications Strategy?

Good communication is at the heart of everything we do.

The services we provide and the decisions we make affect the lives of people in our communities every day. Putting in place timely, effective and engaging methods of communicating with the community about services and programs, events and initiatives in the Shire, promotes equitable access to the things they need to feel connected and supported

In line with the actions of the *Council Plan 2021-2025*, this Strategy is our framework to deliver effective communication, that continues to meet the needs of community members as they seek to be informed and engaged with Council and its activities.

This Strategy supports and is closely aligned to Council's *Community Engagement Policy* and our strong focus on advocacy as highlighted in our *Advocacy Priorities 2022* document. Together, these documents support our commitment to delivering our *Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040* which emphasises the importance of Council working to keep our community engaged and connected (see page 11).

In line with our *Access, Equity and Inclusion Policy*, our communications activities within this Strategy apply a lens of gender equity, diversity and accessibility. It will also link closely with our *Customer First Strategy* as we continue to develop and refine the next iteration and that guiding document.

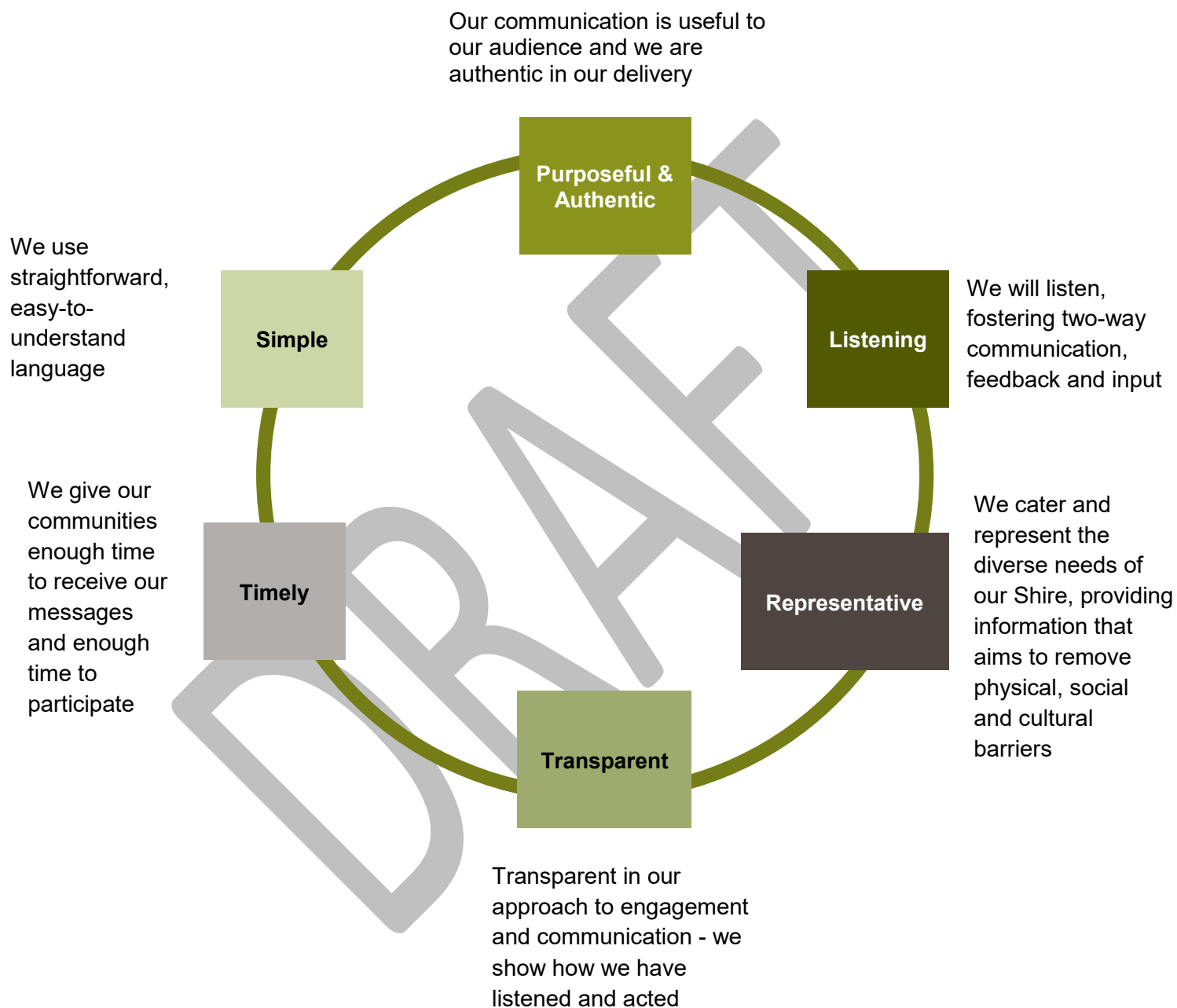
Who is this Strategy for?

A snapshot of our diverse Nillumbik community				
65,369 Total Population	90% Green Wedge covers total area of shire	25 townships	41 years Median age	¼ are Children & Youth (Aged 0-17 years)
1 in 5 people in Nillumbik have a disability This is forecast to increase by 67 per cent by 2026	30% of older residents are aged over 55 years		9% speak a language other than English were born overseas	428 Council staff 7 Councillors



Guiding principles

The following principles will guide the way we will communicate with our audiences to deliver honest and meaningful communications that meets their diverse needs.



Challenges and focus areas

When it comes to communicating and informing our community, there are three potential challenges that are characteristic of the Nillumbik experience.

1. Reaching a broad audience

In a Shire where there is a significant urban population, but significant rural land area, the channels to reach our communities must be diverse and must include a mix of digital, traditional and in-person methods.

- **Urban households** typically have adequate mobile and internet connection and high digital device usage among some user groups. However, some groups, such as older, residents may not be using digital channels and require more direct-to-home or 'at-place' methods.
- **Rural households** (those living within the Green wedge zones) comprise about 12,000 out of the Shire's approximately 65,000 residents. Mobile phone and internet coverage is at times limited in these areas. Further, a number of properties, especially in rural parts of the Shire, have no formal letterbox.

2. Engaging people's interest

When we communicate with our communities, we acknowledge that not everyone, at all moments in time, will wish to engage with us.

Many residents within the Shire prefer to seek information when they need it, having minimal interaction with Council unless a problem occurs and they are seeking a solution or service.

This group of 'the unengaged', may shift into 'potentially engaged' where the communication is interesting to them or has relevance to their lives at that point in time.

Compared to the majority, a cohort of residents and community groups exist that are 'highly engaged' with Council activity and decision making and have high information and engagement needs.

Our strategy aims to reflect the needs of both the engaged, unengaged and potentially engaged groups, noting that enhancing the relevance of information to people's everyday lives will assist in keeping the unengaged connected to vital information that serves them.

3. High volumes of information out and low volumes of insight

Council has the responsibility for delivering many services that directly impact the lives of those in our community. We therefore have a great deal of information to share about our services, laws, policies, programs and decisions. Understanding what is most important to specific areas of our community and what information they seek will help better target our communication to what people need and want, and help manage this volume.

However, while our Annual Community Survey gives a good indication of the ways that people like to hear from Council (such as online or direct mail), and their top issues related to satisfaction with Council, we lack an evidence-based understanding of 'what' people like to hear about from us.

Focus areas

In developing this Strategy, we have acknowledged that these key challenges can impact the effectiveness of our communication and engagement activities within the community. The focus of this Strategy will be on excelling in these three focus areas:

1. Focusing our efforts on reaching the 'potentially engaged'

We recognise that not every resident or group within Nillumbik will engage with us every time and our best efforts should be directed to finding the cross-over where people's interest and need meets our message at the time (the potentially engaged).

The opportunity to be connected to information should be easily accessible to all who need it, and our communication will be better targeted to sectors of the community. To find that cross-over of community need and our message, we, at **Council, will adopt a more proactive** way of forward-planning our communication activity.

2. Increasing the relevance of our communications

Our communication with you should always be timely, relevant and accessible to your needs, and not only to Council requirements. We will aim to put you at the heart of our stories, our language and our communications content.

Relevance means that we show the importance of our message/service/offering **to the everyday lives** of our community members. This means that our message and content approach will be strengthened to focus more on the language of and interest or benefits to our community and feature Nillumbik people in our images and stories.

To get that right, we'll enhance our understanding with a stronger evidence base about what community needs and want.

3. Expanding the reach of our communication

Our current channels for communication remain an essential part of how we communicate with you, so our **focus will be to enhance** them with more evidence about what makes them successful. Priority actions in this strategy seek to continue to build a clear picture of what works best for our community.

As the audience online continues to grow, we will continue to enhance our digital communications while also realising more 'placed-based' avenues and tap into other networks to help spread the word.

Our strategic objective

We will improve how Nillumbik's people are connected to the information they need and want about relevant Council programs, services and decisions, to enable them to live supported, active and connected lives within our community.

We will do this by expanding the reach of our message and increasing the relevance of and trust in our communication with community.

With our Strategy's focus on increasing the connection to and relevance of our communication to our audiences, the way we deliver and design our communications for them requires Council to adapt our approaches internally.

This strategic approach of building relevance and increasing the proactivity of our information, will underpin all of our communication activity going forward.

Strategic pillars of action

These four pillars inform the action plan that will deliver our strategic aim of connecting people to information in a more relevant way that expands the opportunity to reach them.

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Use communication to enhance our transparency about why we've made decisions and taken actions

IDENTITY

Enhance the Nillumbik identity by embedding a strong visual presence and consistent and engaging messaging

REACH

Improve our digital presence with more engaging content tailored to audiences on those channels

Strengthen our non-digital communications options to cater to communities that are not online

CAPABILITY

Build Council capacity to clearly communicate and champion Council priorities to our community and other stakeholders

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Use communication to enhance our transparency about why we've made decisions and taken actions

Key Actions

1. Build relationships with third parties via an 'open door' to help inform broader community about Council services and decisions, recognising their independence
2. Consistently show the action we've taken to listen, hear and advocate for community issues

We will focus on working better with third parties, such as interested community and civic groups, local and metropolitan media and prominent local identities, to share Council information, news and decisions, with the full information we can provide them. We will also show how we've listened and what we've heard, and how we have or why we couldn't take on feedback in final decisions made.

IDENTITY

Enhance the Nillumbik identity by embedding a strong visual presence and consistent and engaging messaging

Key Actions

1. Refocus our messaging to be 'audience-centric' and feature more of the people of our community
2. Create a forward plan of our content based on known interests of people at particular times of year
3. Build a clear evidence base of 'what works' and what information people seek from us through research and data analysis

We will focus strongly on building relevance in our messages to our audience's interest.

By engaging and consistent messaging, we mean:

- Simple, yet creative and targeted language. We use the appropriate tone for the message, but most importantly we speak authentically as a Council that cares for its community.
- Using angles of interest to the community to highlight what the benefit is to the audience. Feature community enjoying or benefiting from a council service or event.

By persistent visual presence we mean:

- Consistent use of the Nillumbik brand style on all digital and physical communications materials across Council.
- Allowing our creative, 'green' and community-focused identity to shine through imagery and graphics.

CAPABILITY

Build Council capacity to clearly communicate and champion Council priorities to our community and other stakeholders

Key Actions

1. Provide in-house training in how to use branding and content creation that is audience focused, not 'Council focused'
2. Work together to build a forward plan for community engagement opportunities
3. Assist all areas of council to understand audience needs and what is effective, with a foundation of inclusiveness and equity in access to communications messages.

There are many points of contact between our community and Council. Across the organisation, knowledge varies about community needs and about how best to interact with our community. We will focus on how the Communications and Engagement team can assist others within Council create a consistent and streamlined experience for community and stakeholders with how we better engage and communicate with them.

REACH

Improve our digital presence with more engaging content tailored to audiences on those channels

Strengthen our non-digital communications options to cater to communities that are not online

Key Actions

1. Explore the feasibility of new, physical channels to target 'hard-to-reach' community at places they frequent.
2. Drive traffic to social channels through a campaign that highlights 'What locals need to know' and offer incentives to connect with Council.
3. Keep audiences engaged with better digital content - more video, better images, more about 'them'
4. Repurpose content - good stories across e-newsletters and various sites get lost 'forever' and seen by only small audiences.

A number of our audiences spend significant time online but don't follow Council on our social media channels or request our newsletters. Engaging with Council doesn't come to mind for these audiences, unless they get something 'delivered' to their letterbox, or have an issue to resolve. We will focus on creating more 'digital impressions' for the audiences already online, by offering more engaging social media content that captures their attention. Council will implement a sustained campaign to entice audiences to include Nillumbik into their digital 'feeds' by subscribing or following us.

Recognising that a portion of our audiences aren't online, and may be harder to reach, we will focus also on finding new physical spaces and network opportunities to promote key activities and opportunities.

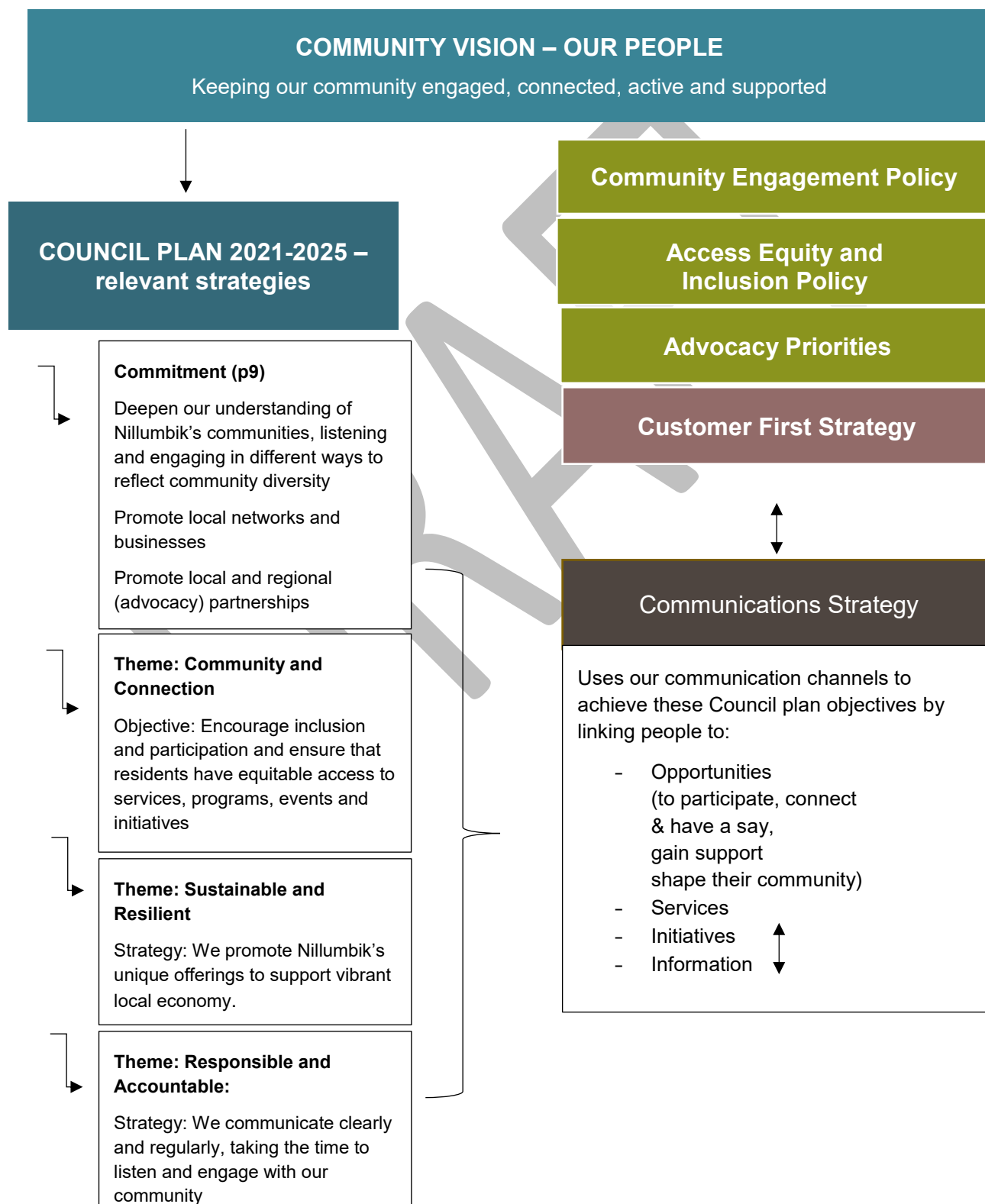
PRIORITY ACTIONS AND MEASURES OF SUCCESS UNDER EACH PILLAR CAN BE FOUND IN THE APPENDIXED ACTION PLAN.

Strategic alignment with the Community Vision – Nillumbik 2040 and the Council Plan 2021-2025

The Strategy is a priority action of the Council Plan 2021-2025 and also aligns with other objectives and actions within the Plan. It supports and is closely aligned to Council's Community Engagement Policy, our Access Equity and Inclusion Policy and our Advocacy Priorities for 2022.

It will also align with future iterations of the Customer First Strategy.

All four of these documents support our overall **Community Vision - Nillumbik 2040**.



Implementation and reporting

Council is committed to monitoring and reporting progress on the actions in our Communications Strategy.

Implementation

In line with the timeframes for Council Plan, this Strategy guides our actions to end of 2025.

Our Strategy's Priority Actions will be reviewed every year and updated where necessary to reflect current needs or changes. We will also indicate where actions are complete or ongoing.

An internal Annual Action Plan will be developed to create a more detailed implementation roadmap to deliver the actions contained in this Strategy. It will include which areas of Council are responsible for which actions and outline the actions for each year of the Strategy.

Reporting Progress

A progress report against key deliverables in the Annual Action Plan aligned to the Strategy will be prepared and reported to a Council Meeting each year, including our progress against measures of success.

A summary of our progress against the Council Plan will be reported annually through the Annual Report.

Outcomes from this Strategy will also align with and be actioned through other Council strategy documents and plans, and reported to a Council Meeting periodically.

Appendix One: Action Plan

TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY

Use communication to enhance our transparency about why we've made decisions and taken actions

PRIORITY ACTIONS

4.1 Build our **relationships with local community news and selected community groups online** by offering them more of the detail behind Council stories.

4.2 **Identify our community groups with whom we could better engage.**

4.3 **Standardise and improve for transparency the way we report feedback** from engagements and how it has been used in decision making.

4.4 Ensure our public statements, media releases and short videos about Council decisions communicate the outcome, but also the **reason for** the outcome

4.5 Work with other councils to **develop forward plans for advocacy stories** with national and metropolitan media outlets, as well as our own channels.

4.6 Monitor social media (and other feedback channels) to **identify potential areas of confusion or concern** in the community that need to be addressed proactively.

4.7 Develop updated **Issues Management Communications Plan** – including templates and processes.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

In our Annual Community Survey:

- Increase 'Community consultation' core measure score to 'good', up from 'solid' in 2021
- Increase 'advocacy' core measure to 'good', up from 'poor' in 2021
- Increase 'Maintaining Trust and confidence in local community score to 'Good' or better, up from 'solid' in 2021

Social media:

Responses to negative or incorrect comments on our social media channels are posted within 24 hours

Feedback

During our debrief processes for engagement projects we see a rise in positive comments coming from any of these sources:

- Councillors and Council staff reporting back positive comments from community about our transparency.
- A rise in positive social media comments about the way we have explained or given information.
- Community groups we interact with that, commenting positively that we 'listened', were transparent, and or authentic.

IDENTITY

Enhance the Nillumbik identity by embedding a strong visual presence and consistent and engaging messaging

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- 1.1 Develop an annual whole of council **communications calendar** that outlines the priority information, about services and key projects, that the community needs, as well as opportunities to connect to actions from the Council Plan.
- 1.2 Develop the **processes and framework for our new strategic approach** of 'community focused', 'proactive' stories across our channels.
- 1.3 Enhance our **content about Nillumbik's people and places on our digital channels by working with the community to tell our stories.**
- 1.4 Enhance Council staff **capacity to use audience-centric and engaging language** for community by developing or revising guidelines and training.
- 1.5 Enhance **Council's ability to implement the brand and visual identity** consistently, through internal image libraries and revised guidelines, templates and processes.
- 1.6 Examine **ways to increase our evidence base** of 'what people want to hear about from us' and continue building on current data analysis and review methods of our channels.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Social media:

We increase engagements with our posts by at least 20% (such as likes or shares) on 2021 levels.

All communications outputs:

- We reach target of featuring one new 'direct from community' story or social media post per quarter.
- We reach target of 98% of communications outputs containing correct Nillumbik brand

Nillumbik E-newsletter engagement:

- We establish a consistent open rate of 50%
- We establish click-throughs to articles rate of 15%

Participate Platform engagement

We increase the number of people participating in our engagements by 15% on 2021 levels.

Website

We maintain the satisfaction score of the 'Interest and relevance of articles on website in our Annual Community Survey, at 'Very Good' or higher.

Internal to Council:

- The annual content and communication priorities calendar is developed and signed off with input from all relevant departments.
- Annual feedback from Council staff satisfaction shows that the Communications and Engagement team processes and outputs are ranked as 'solid or 'good'.
- Our internal digital image library use increases to 30% of Council staff users by end 2023.

CAPABILITY

Build staff and Councillor capacity to clearly communicate and champion Council priorities to our community and other stakeholders

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- 2.1 Refresh our **internal processes and guidelines**, ensuring objective, audience and message are in line with the annual calendar and have a more proactive and audience-focused approach.
- 2.2 Reintroduce **training for staff in 'Communications and brand - 101'** for new staff inductions into Council and available to wider staff.
- 2.3. Enhance the ways staff across council can **have a shared idea 'what community has said'** and what their areas of interest are' in a more cohesive way.
- 2.4 Develop a **calendar of engagement** with Council departments/teams for each year, with 'no-go zones' (such as holidays etc) and clear thematic ties to community based on their interest.
- 2.5 Develop guidelines that will **help streamline and improve engagement methods** and the way they are promoted.
- 2.6 Make messages about projects, initiatives and issues available to all Council teams and Councillors so more of us can **talk confidently and consistently** on Council behalf.
- 2.7 Increase **direct engagement** with Councillors and the Communications Team **to obtain grass roots insight and areas of support.**

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

- We increase staff downloads and visits to communications tools on the Council staff intranet by 15% on 2021 levels.
- An internal working calendar of engagement is developed and signed off with all input from divisions.
- At least 75% of relevant council staff have attended training sessions.
- During bi-annual meet ups, Councillors and spokespeople express that they feel well-prepared to talk to community about council business.

REACH

Improve our digital presence with more engaging content tailored to audiences on those channels

Strengthen our non-digital communications options to cater to communities that are not online

PRIORITY ACTIONS

Digital channel actions

3.1 Develop a **Social Media Strategy** to review channels and their audiences, and refocus and plan content accordingly to be more impactful and meet audience preferences.

3.2 Increase **the amount of digital video content produced** for Council's social media channels, featuring real Nillumbik people and stories.

3.3 Promote **Council's website and social media channels as primary sources** at every customer interaction.

3.4 Review the **effectiveness, reach and popularity of all Nillumbik digital channels** at various intervals and develop plans for future improvements, with particular emphasis on website useability.

Printed collateral actions

3.5 Continue **Nillumbik News at same quarterly frequency** with a view to review frequency and mode of delivery every two years.

3.6 Investigate new printed collateral options to **deliver directly to 'hard to reach groups'**.

3.7 Explore the **reintroduction of a hard copy new residents pack** with a view to providing key information about Council services and facilities.

'At place' actions

3.8 Investigate **expanding the range of 'at place' noticeboards** (eg. Civic and Rec Centres/libraries) and include ways to measure their use, digitise them and run relevant expanded content.

3.9 Investigate an **expanded calendar of Council presence at key community events** and festivals.

Other actions

3.10 Audit and review the entire range of external **channels within each division**, mapping the audience they are reaching and understanding the content that could be repurposed, shared or combined.

3.11 Apply a **lens of equity and accessibility** (including language and ease of use) to our key informative, strategic and consultation documents.

MEASURING OUR SUCCESS

Social media

We increase engagement across all platforms, but in particular:

- Increase Nillumbik Instagram Facebook and LinkedIn followers

Nillumbik E-newsletter engagement

- We establish 10,000 subscribers to Nillumbik E-news by 2024

Website engagement

- We increase Nillumbik website visitors
- We increase satisfaction score of customer visits to website in Biannual Customer Experience Survey
- We increase the number of visits to our Participate Platform
- We increase awareness of Participate in our Annual Community Survey
- Our website meets accessibility standards by end 2023

Internal to Council

- Our annual review of channels (across Council) show a rise in engagement
- We repurpose at least 4 news stories into different channels per month

Physical channel engagement

- The Nillumbik News surveys get a 30% response rate
- We maintain Nillumbik News readership score at greater than 50% in our Annual Community Survey
- We establish a 12 month event engagement calendar
- QR codes on physical notice boards confirm usage rates

Appendix 2 - How we currently communicate

We use a number of channels to communicate and engage.

Digital and Social	Publications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate Nillumbik website, participate.nillumbik.vic.gov.au • Nillumbik Shire Council website, nillumbik.vic.gov.au <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nillumbik Youth ○ Living & Learning Nillumbik ○ Edendale Community Environment Farm • Social media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Instagram ○ Facebook (plus Family & Children's Services, Nillumbik Arts, Hurstbridge Hub, Edendale, Visit Nillumbik, Nillumbik Youth, Living & Learning) ○ Twitter ○ YouTube ○ LinkedIn 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nillumbik News (our quarterly magazine direct to residents) • E-Newsletters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nillumbik E-news (monthly) ○ Nillumbik Arts News (monthly) ○ Ageing Well in Nillumbik (quarterly) ○ Business in Nillumbik (fortnightly) ○ Disability Inclusion Network (monthly) ○ Environmental News (monthly) ○ Living & Learning Nillumbik (monthly) ○ Club Development update (?) ○ Quarterly email sent to Early Learning Centre providers and Preschools • Print promotions such as posters or flyers - in Council buildings, libraries and recreation facilities • Annual reports and Council plans, strategies and policies (with accessible versions available and, in some cases, Easy English versions)
In person	Other channels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in sessions, site visits and open days • Focus groups, workshops and stakeholder briefing sessions • Through our Customer Service Team on 9433 3111 • Community information/consultation sessions, workshops, focus groups • Monthly Council Meeting, and Planning and Consultation Meeting - in person and livestreamed • Councillor and CEO speaking engagements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media promotion including media releases and/or advertising, including Public Notices, radio interviews • Electronic noticeboards at Council buildings and recreation facilities • Community noticeboards across the Shire • Participation in Annual Community Survey • Emergency Management – community committees and participation • Language Interpretation Services

Appendix 3 - What we heard

From the 2021 Annual Community Satisfaction Survey

501 respondents (out of a total population of over 65,000) participated in a telephone survey in early 2021. Results showed, that in 2021, respondents prefer to receive information from or interact with Council by:

1. **Email** (47.5% up from 35.4% compared to the previous year)
 - Nillumbik e-news was introduced in February 2022
2. **Direct mail / letterbox drop of information** (26.3% down from 43.0%)
3. **Nillumbik News** (25.0% down from 25.6%)
 - Almost half of respondents regularly receive and read it
 - 18% report that they do not receive it
4. **Council's website** (20.8% down from 29.2%).
 - Almost 10% visit frequently
 - 45.2% visit at least 'infrequently'
 - Average satisfaction with website is 7.39 ("Very Good")

Results for Engagement and Participate Nillumbik

40 projects in 2021* out for community engagement and consultation	8,000* submissions gathered. <small>*approximately</small>
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Of those surveyed:

- Lack of communication or consultation with community was expressed as an issue to address by 4.6% of respondents.
- Only 10.7% were aware of the Participate Nillumbik engagement site
 - Of those, only 11 people have actively used the site (3 of them up to once per month)
 - 13 people have visited but not used it.
- *Maintaining community trust and confidence* represented a solid *satisfactory* performance.

Feedback from our Community Engagement Policy Consultation

Engagement matters to the Nillumbik community, regardless of whether they choose to engage or not, there is a strong view among the community that the opportunity to provide feedback be made easily available.

Improvements are needed to:

- The method in which we communicate engagement activities (the majority of community groups reported that they are not aware of engagement when it is happening).
- The need to communicate through a mix of channels and platforms (digital and traditional).
- Providing a clear purpose for particular consultation. There was a strong view expressed of the importance of 'closing the loop' at the culmination of consultation.
- The way we inform the community of the results of the engagement, (if they do engage there is a view that their voices will not be heard and Council are not clear and transparent with their feedback and decision making).

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