Council Plan – Major Review

Communication and Engagement Plan

Purpose

The Shire of Denmark will undertake a major review of its Council Plan in 2027. In line with the Community Engagement Policy, this plan is being presented to Council as the Council Plan is of strategic importance.

The purpose of this Communication and Engagement Plan is to set out how the Shire will engage with the community to inform the review and ensure Council has contemporary information about community perceptions, priorities, experiences and emerging issues when considering the Shire's future strategic direction.

The engagement will comprise three complementary activities:

1. **Community Scorecard**, providing broad community feedback on Shire performance, services and priorities;
2. **Councillor Listening Conversations,** informal listening conversations on identified topics and
3. **Community Representative Forum**, providing an opportunity to explore significant themes arising from the Scorecard and better understand the experiences and issues behind the results.

The approach recognises that the Community Scorecard is already comprehensive and seeks to avoid unnecessarily duplicating questions through additional engagement.

Engagement objectives

The engagement will:

- understand current community perceptions of the Shire and its services;
- identify areas the community considers important for the Shire's longer-term focus;
- identify changes in community perceptions and priorities;
- identify emerging issues or changes that Council should consider in its longer-term planning;
- provide community perspectives to be considered alongside financial, asset management, demographic, legislative, risk and other strategic information.

Engagement approach - IAP2 level: Consult

The community will be invited to provide views and information to assist Council's consideration of the Council Plan. Community engagement will provide an important source of evidence but will not, by itself, determine Council's strategic priorities. The community is not expected to have the technical information necessary to determine matters such as infrastructure renewal priorities, asset investment, service delivery models or resource allocation.

The engagement will therefore focus on **community experience, expectations and emerging issues**, with Council considering this information alongside technical evidence, professional advice, statutory responsibilities and the Shire's financial and organisational capacity.

Engagement activities

1: Community Scorecard

Timing: Late February to March 2027

The 2027 Community Scorecard will be the Shire's sixth Community Scorecard, continuing an established community engagement program undertaken in June 2018, May 2019, October 2020, September 2022 and May 2025. The 2027 Scorecard will provide a valuable opportunity to consider current community views alongside previous results and identify changes in community perceptions, priorities and expectations over time.

The Community Scorecard will provide the primary broad-based community engagement for the major review. The Scorecard has previously sought community feedback about the Shire as a place to live, visit and do business; the Shire as an organisation; community needs; and a broad range of services and facilities. It also asks respondents to rate performance across areas covering community, natural environment, built environment, economic development, and leadership and communication.

Importantly for the major review, the Scorecard asks respondents to select their top three areas for improvement over the next 10 years from those areas. Respondents are then asked what major projects, changes or improvements are needed to address their selected priorities.

The 2027 Scorecard will therefore provide the principal mechanism for identifying community perceptions and priorities. Where appropriate, consistency with previous Scorecards should be retained to support comparison over time.

2: Councillor Listening Conversations

Timing: April to early May 2027

Prior to each Community Representative Forum, Councillors will undertake informal listening conversations with at least five community members on the identified forum topics. Councillors will be provided with a small number of consistent discussion prompts to help explore community experiences and perspectives.

Councillors will bring the key themes from these conversations to the Forum as a conversation starter, asking representatives whether these observations reflect what they are hearing or experiencing and, importantly, what may be missing.

These conversations are not intended to be representative community research. Rather, they complement the Community Scorecard by providing additional context and helping Councillors develop a deeper understanding of issues before considering future priorities.

3: Community Representatives Forum

Timing: April to early May 2027

Following receipt and analysis of the Community Scorecard results, the Shire will invite representatives from a cross-section of community organisations and interests to participate in a facilitated Community Representative Forum.

The Forum will complement, rather than repeat, the broad community engagement undertaken through the Community Scorecard. Its purpose will be to explore significant themes emerging from the Scorecard, better understand the experiences and issues that may be contributing to those results, and identify emerging matters that Council should consider as part of the major review.

Participants will not be asked to determine technical solutions, projects or expenditure priorities. Discussion will focus on community experience and the implications of the Scorecard findings.

Participation will seek to include a broad cross-section of community perspectives. Feedback from the Forum will be reported as qualitative stakeholder input and will not be presented as representative of the broader community.

The conversations will focus on questions such as:

1. What do you think is behind these results?
2. Is there anything Council needs to better understand when considering these findings?
3. Looking ahead four years, are there emerging changes or issues that are not adequately reflected in the results?

The conversations are not intended to ask participants to determine technical solutions, individual projects or expenditure priorities. Rather, they will help Council better understand community experiences, concerns and perspectives on the issues identified through the Community Scorecard.

The conversations will also provide an opportunity to explain the considerations and constraints Council will need to balance when determining its future priorities, including financial capacity, existing commitments, asset requirements, legislative responsibilities and the Shire's capacity to deliver.

The Shire will determine the format and location of the conversations after analysing the Scorecard results, allowing the activity to focus on areas where further community input will add value.

Communication channels and responsibilities

Channel / Activity	Purpose
Community Scorecard	Broad community feedback on performance and priorities
Community Representative Forums	Explore significant Scorecard themes
Your Denmark	Central online information about the major review
Shire website	Promote engagement opportunities and provide information
Social media	Promote participation and reminders
Denmark Bulletin	Broader community awareness
Shire e-newsletter	Promote participation and provide updates
Community networks	Extend promotion through existing networks

How engagement will inform decision-making

Community feedback will be treated as one important source of evidence informing the major review.

The Community Scorecard will provide broad evidence about community perceptions and priorities. The Community Representative Forums will provide greater understanding of the experiences and issues underlying significant Scorecard findings.

These findings will then be considered alongside:

- asset management information;
- financial capacity and long-term financial planning;
- demographic and population information;
- statutory responsibilities;
- risk;
- service demand;
- existing strategies and plans; and
- professional and technical advice.

This recognises that community members are well placed to describe their experiences and expectations, while Council must ultimately determine priorities having regard to the broader evidence and resources available to the Shire.

Reporting and closing the loop

Following completion of the major review, the Shire will provide the community with the updated Council Plan – ***OUR FUTURE 2037***. This plan will report on the outcomes of the engagement and how community feedback was considered.

A concise **"What You Told Us – What We Considered – Where We Landed** approach will be used where appropriate:

What you told us
Key findings from the Community Scorecard and Community Representative Forums.

What We Considered
Relevant technical, financial, statutory and organisational considerations.

Where we landed
How the matter has been addressed through the Council Plan, including an explanation where significant community feedback has not resulted in a change.

Where the Community Scorecard identifies significant community concerns regarding services or issues outside the Shire's direct responsibility, relevant aggregated findings may be provided to the responsible agency for information and consideration. This ensures the Shire acknowledges community feedback and directs it appropriately, without creating an expectation that it is responsible for delivering services outside its remit.

Evaluation

The effectiveness of the engagement will be assessed by considering:

- participation in the Community Scorecard;
- whether responses provide broad community representation;
- participation in Community Representative Forums;
- the quality and usefulness of qualitative feedback;
- whether the engagement identified information relevant to the major review; and
- whether the Shire can clearly demonstrate how community feedback was considered in Council's decision-making.

The aim is not simply to maximise the number of engagement activities, but to ensure each activity provides useful information and clearly informs the major review.