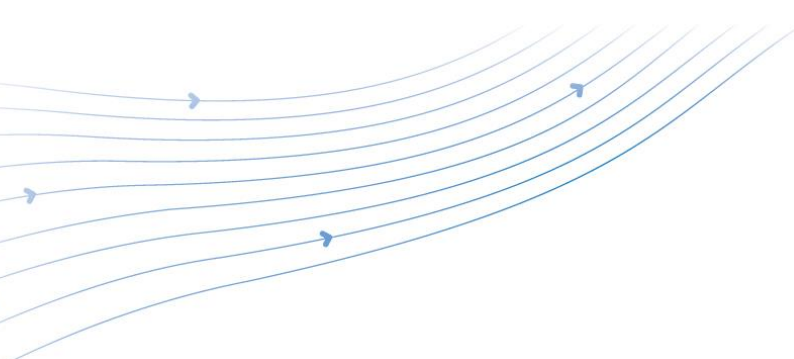


# Central Highlands Regional Council

## **Resident Communications Survey**

September 2020

*make the right decision*



# RESIDENT COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY

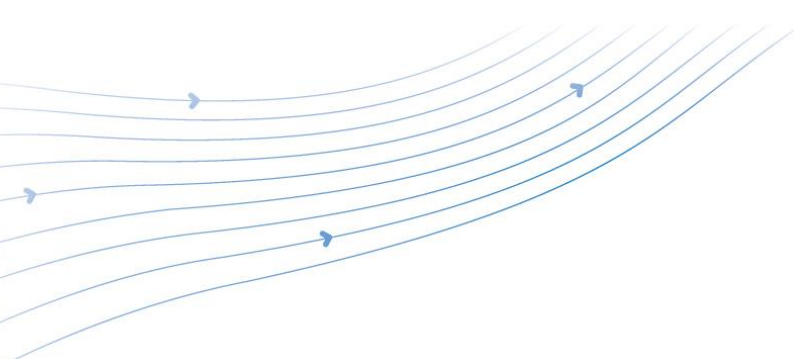
**SEPTEMBER 2020**



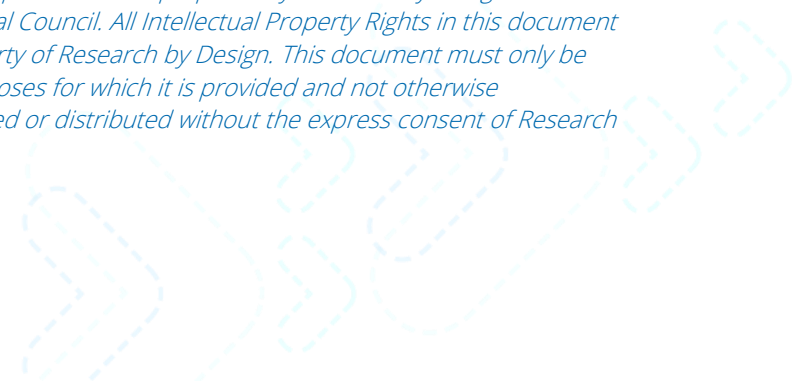
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide the Communications Team at Central Highlands Regional Council with a ready reckoner to guide them in their choice of the most appropriate media and social media channels, and residents' most preferred frequency regarding of communications from the council.

Feedback clearly shows that Facebook is the preferred option to keep residents informed about all council business with the exception of weather alerts where an SMS is favoured – although Facebook is still an important channel as well.

Frequency of information is also important and the Communications Team is able to develop an effective, and resident-driven, timetable to support their preferences from the information presented in this report.

It is worth noting the Communications Team may wish to review and consolidate the various channels; in particular Twitter, ads on TV and Instagram, which do not appear to be as effective as they could be. Resources may be better redirected to managing other, more important, channels of communication – particularly Facebook.

Residents were also asked to rate the quality of the council's communications, which is, overall, below average. Qualitative commentary presented in this report (refer to p. 15) highlights that reporting regarding "council matters" and "reporting of important local issues to residents by the council" is below average. It is important to residents that council matters are reported accurately and transparently.

Residents also noted that there should be more community consultation, particularly with regards to public works in their communities.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>KEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>KEY RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>SURVEY AWARENESS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>PREFERRED CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION BY TYPE</b>	<b>4</b>
4.1	WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LOCAL AREA	4
4.2	SEVERE WEATHER ALERTS	5
4.3	ROAD CLOSURES AND PUBLIC WORKS ALERTS	6
4.4	ART GALLERY EXHIBITS, LIBRARY INFORMATION AND EVENTS	7
4.5	COMMUNITY EVENTS	8
4.6	SPORTS AND RECREATION INFORMATION	9
4.7	CHANGES TO COUNCIL BUSINESS AND REPORTING	10
4.8	TOURISM NEWS AND PROJECTS	11
4.9	YOUTH EVENTS AND PROJECTS	12
4.10	ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS AND EVENTS	13
<b>5.0</b>	<b>QUALITY OF COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION</b>	<b>14</b>
5.1	SNAPSHOT OF THE QUALITY OF COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION	14
<b>6.0</b>	<b>VERBATIM COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK</b>	<b>15</b>

# 1.0 KEY FINDINGS

**TABLE 1** Most preferred media channel and frequency of information

INFORMATION	MOST PREFERRED CHANNEL	FREQUENCY
What's happening in my local area.	Facebook	Weekly
Severe weather alerts.	SMS	Immediately
Road closures and public works alerts.	Facebook	Immediately
Art Gallery exhibits, library information and events.	Facebook	Monthly
Community events.	Facebook	Weekly
Sports and recreation information.	Facebook	Weekly
Changes to council business and reporting.	Facebook	As required
Tourism news and projects.	Facebook	Monthly
Youth events and projects.	Facebook	Weekly
Environmental projects and events.	Facebook	Monthly

*Source: Research by Design 2020, (n=286)*

Table 1 above provides a snapshot of the most preferred communications' channels for the various types of information being sent out to local residents. Further information for each category can be found on pages 4 through 13 of this report.

It is an important finding in this report that Facebook is an essential medium to communicate effectively and efficiently with local residents – its role in the community cannot be understated. Management of the council's Facebook page should be considered a priority, together with content and management of the digital and hardcopy newsletters and information sent out via the now local online local newspaper. Radio remains an important tool as well.

However, it is worth reviewing the effectiveness and importance of Instagram, Twitter and ads on local TV where resources could be redeployed to the more important channels listed above.

Residents would also like to see an improvement in the quality of information they receive, and importantly accurate and transparent reporting related to council matters such as meetings and outcomes from these meetings.



## 2.0 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Communications Team at Central Highlands Regional Council are now able to:

- Prioritise Facebook as the most important medium of communications with local residents
- Consider reviewing and consolidating the most important and effective media channels – i.e. it may be worth considering redeploying resources away from the less effective options such as Twitter, Instagram and ads on TV to more important options – especially Facebook
- Set up a standardised and easily managed, cost-effective schedule of communications for residents e.g.
  - **What's happening in my local area** – weekly via
    - Facebook;
    - Online newsletter; and/or
    - Newsletter in my letterbox and/or SMS and/or radio.
- Review the quality of the content of information being communicated to residents. It is a clear finding in this report that residents want timely, accurate and transparent reporting on council activities and other matters such as reporting of council meetings and outcomes from those meetings.
- And, finally, a small number of comments referred to website content and useability; the Communications Team may wish to consider undertaking a useability study of the website as part of a future review of this important communication medium.

## 3.0 SURVEY AWARENESS

Respondents were asked where they heard about the survey.

The most consistent channel to communicate about the survey was council's Facebook page, accounting for almost 40% of all respondents; almost double the second most effective communication channel (email).

Additionally, those that indicated "other" in their responses further adds to this finding that Facebook is an important channel for communication for council, as people also:

- saw or shared the survey link on their personal Facebook feeds;
- saw the survey link on the CHRC Councillor's Q&A Facebook page; and
- saw the survey link on a local town Facebook page the respondent belonged to.

**TABLE 2** How did you hear about this survey?

CHANNEL	RESPONSES	% TOTAL*
A link on the council's Facebook page.	112	37.2
Information about the survey was emailed direct to me.	68	22.6
A link on the enewsletter I receive.	58	19.3
Other	35	11.6
I saw the link on the council's website.	13	4.3
A survey was available at my local library or regional council office.	10	3.3
A link via a publication from the Central Highlands Development Corporation.	4	1.3
A local newspaper (online or physical paper).	1	0.3
A link on the council's Twitter feed.	0	0.0
A link on the council's Instagram feed.	0	0.0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>100%</b>

*Source: Research by Design 2020*

\* Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding.



## 4.0 PREFERRED CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION BY TYPE

The tables below breakdown which communication channels residents prefer about which types of information and with what frequency.

Tables 4.1 through 4.10 can be used as a quick guide to set up a standardised schedule for communicating important issues and events to the local community through residents' preferred channels as indicated in the survey.

### 4.1 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MY LOCAL AREA

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY <sup>+</sup>
<b>1</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>81.1</b>	<b>WEEKLY</b> (47.0%)
2	Online newsletter	48.3	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	29.0	
4	SMS	21.3	
5	Radio	15.0	
6	Online local newspaper	13.3	
7	Instagram	8.7	
8	Ads on TV	7.3	
9	Twitter	2.1	
10	Not at all	1.1	

Source: Research by Design 2020

\* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.

+ The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

## 4.2 SEVERE WEATHER ALERTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY+
<b>1</b>	<b>SMS</b>	<b>82.5</b>	<b>IMMEDIATELY</b> (82.8%)
2	Facebook	67.8	
3	Radio	28.7	
4	Online newsletter	15.7	
5	Ads on TV	15.0	
6	Instagram	9.4	
7	Newsletter in my letterbox	7.3	
8	Online local newspaper	6.6	
9	Twitter	3.9	
10	Not at all	1.4	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

Not surprisingly, the most important method of communication for weather alerts is SMS given the immediacy of the information needing to be sent out. Nevertheless, residents also like this information to be sent to them via Facebook as well.

### 4.3

## ROAD CLOSURES AND PUBLIC WORKS ALERTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY+
<b>1</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>75.2</b>	<b>IMMEDIATELY</b> (40.7%)
2	SMS	53.5	
3	Online newsletter	33.2	
4	Radio	23.1	
5	Newsletter in my letterbox	19.2	
6	Instagram	9.8	
7	Online local newspaper	9.8	
8	Ads on TV	6.6	
9	Twitter	3.5	
10	Not at all	1.1	

Source: Research by Design 2020

\* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.

+ The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

Timeliness of information is paramount as residents were quick to point out they received information too late to act on changing routes due to road closures

## 4.4

## ART GALLERY EXHIBITS, LIBRARY INFORMATION AND EVENTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY <sup>+</sup>
<b>1</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>MONTHLY</b> (33.7%)
2	Online newsletter	39.5	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	16.1	
4	Radio	13.6	
5	Instagram	13.3	
6	Online local newspaper	12.2	
7	SMS	11.9	
8	Not at all	4.2	
9	Ads on TV	3.9	
10	Twitter	3.5	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest percentage preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

## 4.5 COMMUNITY EVENTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY+
<b>1</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>84.3</b>	<b>WEEKLY</b> (42.1%)
2	Online newsletter	48.6	
3	Radio	23.8	
4	Newsletter in my letterbox	23.4	
5	SMS	17.5	
6	Online local newspaper	15.0	
7	Instagram	13.6	
8	Ads on TV	9.8	
9	Twitter	4.2	
10	Not at all	0.4	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

## 4.6

**SPORTS AND RECREATION INFORMATION**

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY <sup>+</sup>
<b>1</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>81.1%</b>	<b>WEEKLY</b> (36.8%)
2	Online newsletter	47.6%	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	18.5%	
4	Radio	18.2%	
5	Online local newspaper	12.2%	
6	Instagram	11.9%	
7	SMS	11.5%	
8	Ads on TV	5.6%	
9	Twitter	3.9%	
10	Not at all	3.5%	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

## 4.7 CHANGES TO COUNCIL BUSINESS AND REPORTING

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY <sup>+</sup>
<b>1</b>	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>65.4%</b>	<b>AS REQUIRED</b> (39.7%)
2	Online newsletter	55.2%	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	24.8%	
4	Radio	15.4%	
5	SMS	14.7%	
6	Online local newspaper	14.3%	
7	Instagram	8.0%	
8	Ads on TV	5.2%	
9	Twitter	3.2%	
10	Not at all	2.8%	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

Council governance is important to local residents and accurate and transparent reporting an important consideration when communicating with them.

Refer to p. 14 of this report for further information of the quality of that communication – which, on average is below average for information related to “council matters” and “important local issues”.

This can also be linked to comments where residents would like to see better community engagement – particularly about public works.

## 4.8 TOURISM NEWS AND PROJECTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY+
1	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>75.9%</b>	<b>MONTHLY</b> (36.8%)
2	Online newsletter	49.3%	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	18.9%	
4	Online local newspaper	14.7%	
5	Instagram	14.0%	
6	Radio	13.6%	
7	SMS	10.1%	
8	Ads on TV	5.6%	
9	Twitter	4.6%	
10	Not at all	3.2%	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.



## 4.9

## YOUTH EVENTS AND PROJECTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY+
1	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>79.7%</b>	<b>WEEKLY</b> (35.4%)
2	Online newsletter	46.5%	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	17.8%	
4	Radio	17.5%	
5	Instagram	16.4%	
6	Online local newspaper	14.3%	
7	SMS	12.2%	
8	Ads on TV	6.3%	
9	Twitter	5.2%	
10	Not at all	3.2%	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

## 4.10 ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS AND EVENTS

PREF.	CHANNEL	%*	FREQUENCY+
1	<b>Facebook</b>	<b>75.2%</b>	<b>MONTHLY</b> (33.7%)
2	Online newsletter	51.4%	
3	Newsletter in my letterbox	20.6%	
4	Online local newspaper	15.4%	
5	Radio	12.9%	
6	SMS	11.2%	
7	Instagram	10.8%	
8	Not at all	3.9%	
9	Twitter	3.5%	
10	Ads on TV	3.5%	

Source: Research by Design 2020

- \* (n=286) Totals will not add up to 100% as respondents could answer with more than one response in this question. Rounded to the nearest single decimal place. Sorted in descending order.
- + The frequency with the highest preference as indicated by respondents in the survey.

## 5.0 QUALITY OF COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION

Respondents were asked to rate the quality of CHRC's quality of communication (i.e. where 1=poor and 5=excellent) across 4 broad communication areas:

1. About community programs;
2. About council matters;
3. Reporting on important local issues to residents; and
4. The accuracy of information communicated by council.

Overall, the quality of communication from council is, at best, slightly below average as indicated by respondents.

### 5.1 SNAPSHOT OF THE QUALITY OF COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION

AREA	WEIGHTED AVERAGE*	RATING*
The quality of the communications I receive from the council about community programs is:	2.93	Slightly below average
The quality of the communications I receive about council matters is:	2.72	Below average
The reporting of important local issues to residents by the council is:	2.56	Below average
The accuracy of information provided by the council is:	2.96	Slightly below average

*Source: Research by Design 2020, (n=282)*

\* The weighted average and rating are based on a 5-point scale where: 1 is poor, 2 is fair, 3 is average, 4 is good and 5 is excellent.

## 6.0 VERBATIM COMMENTS AND FEEDBACK

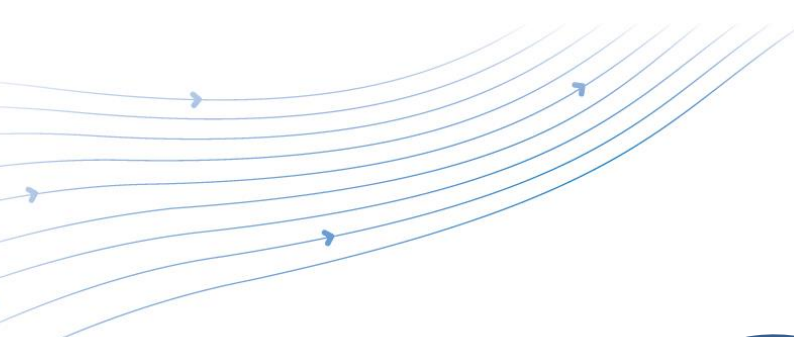
Below is a sample presentation of important comments residents have taken the time provide to council (as is verbatim):

*I am very disappointed with the quality of reporting from Council meetings. The minutes from the meeting often do not give any information on who has voted for or against (no names just numbers). Also, how else is important information or changes from Council proceedings communicated? You have to wade through past minutes to find anything. Council should be communicating every fortnight about matters that we passed at meetings.*

*If the council could post their minutes it would be appreciated so we know actually what is being proposed or in the process of happening - thanks.*

*THERE IS NOT ENOUGH TRANSPARENCY ON HOW THE DECISIONS MADE BY COUNCIL ARE MADE. YOU NEED TO BETTER INFORM PEOPLE AND THEY WILL BE LESS LIKELY TO BE CRANKY. Yes it's in capitals to place emphasis on the comment.*

*What are your goals for the future? Set a planner of what the council would like to achieve in the year.*



*I think residents are not always advised about issues they would like to have a say on if they knew, e.g. increasing the size, quantity of cattle allowed etc. at the saleyards. This is not a good look for Council and creates a lot of negative publicity. It doesn't look like open, honest, accountable government.*

*I would like to know who gets approved for certain works and tasks. I would like to know if it is true that a lot of our tax money is spent on paying for external resources; such as 'expert' advice/proposals hired by people in management roles to essentially do the job they were tasked to do and that concrete pathways are not being completed by a Sydney based company instead of hiring local companies.*

*I would also like to know why 200 metres of roadway is needed to be redone, why the job wasn't done properly the first time and how much money is going into a road that only a small percentage of the town utilise.*

*Would be good to see news, and what decisions/outcomes made on different questions or problems on the council website, which will be easier to go through.*

