

# Newcastle Voice

draft 2009/10 Management Plan and Sustainability Review



Community Consultation Report  
June 2009

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**Appendix I**

Newcastle Voice  
Questionnaire and Analysis

**Appendix II**

Combined Quantitative Newcastle Voice and Key Insights  
Questionnaire and Analysis

**Appendix III**

Key Insights Report

**Appendix IV**

Newcastle Voice  
Ward Forums and Workshops

**Appendix V**

Promotional Tools

**Appendix VI**

Submission Form

**Appendix VI**

Online Interest

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Media Reports

## Executive Summary

This report summarises the public opinion component received during the formal public exhibition period for the draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review.

A Sustainability Review team was convened early in 2009 from staff and external consultants. This team set out to review all Council's operations, which led to a list of nineteen service areas for immediate review. The remaining services will be reviewed by December 2009 in two further stages.

The first set of recommendations was placed on public exhibition from 1 May to 29 May in conjunction with the draft Management Plan. Public opinion was sought in a number of ways including:

- Newcastle Voice, Council's community reference panel (732 responses)
- Telephone survey of residents in each ward (601 responses)
- Public meetings for each ward (96 participants across 3 meetings)
- Written submissions – by email, online form and posted (773 responses)

The majority of public opinion gathered supports many of the nineteen recommendations – with a wide variety of constructive comments received. Many of the views indicate strong support for *all* Council services.

Of the 18 questions, Newcastle Voice and the telephone respondents had similar results, with the exception of question ten on whether or not Council should sell the inner-city car parking stations. The discrepancy between this question's result may be due to the fact that Newcastle Voice had a broader representation of full and part-time workers (73.46%) compared to Key Insights (40.5%).

There was also strongly-expressed interest in other areas of Council activities with the top three being: Council's priorities, the nature of the review and Council's own performance culture.

The weight of comments received through both the Newcastle Voice online and print survey and the telephone survey is with issues *excluded* from the specific recommendations. It is to be expected that a telephone survey will extract comments of a more general nature, as people are contacted without prior engagement with Council. In the Newcastle Voice online and paper survey, panellists have previously engaged with Council, and are more likely to be better informed about Council decision-making processes.

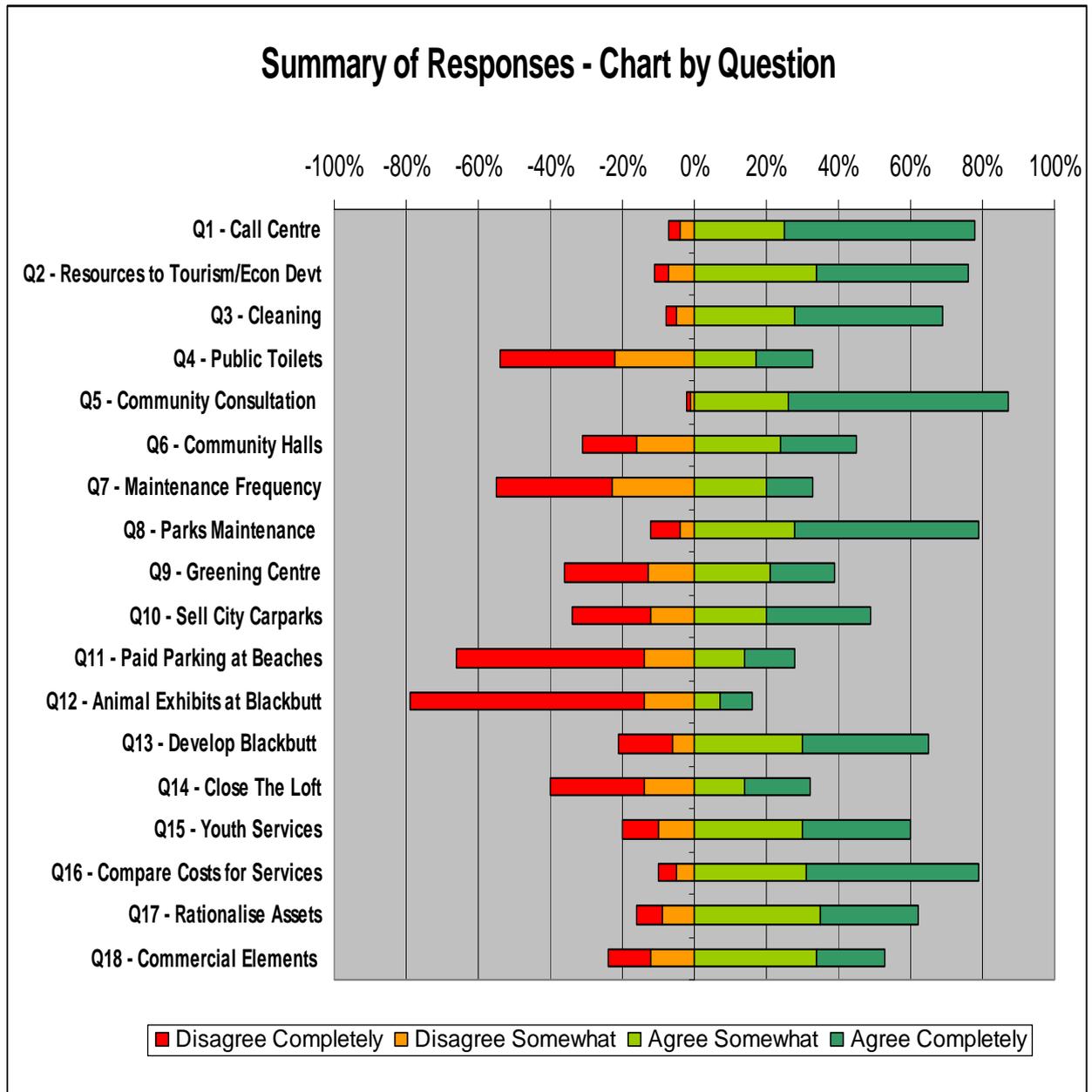
The survey design aroused some concern with comments about the leading nature of some questions and the value-laden phrasing of others. In part this is considered a reflection of community confusion about the precise nature of this consultation – it was never scoped to be about the full range of Council activities.

It might also reflect a level of community dissatisfaction with Council, in that overall dissatisfaction will be expressed no matter the nature of a specific consultation. In all survey design a key challenge lies in the amount of prior information required and provided so that answers can be made from an informed base.

These observations have been taken on board, and will influence the survey design for public consultation during Stages Two and Three of the Sustainability Review.

Widespread public confusion about different levels of government and their respective responsibilities persists, with comments about transport infrastructure, State members and federal responsibilities also being received in the course of this consultation.

The following chart lists the strength of public opinion, in order of questions asked:



The results provide sufficient information to aid decision-making, and there is strong community support for Council resolve and unity of purpose.

## Introduction

In 2008/2009, Council delivered a balanced budget, but the challenge remains to unlock capital from non productive assets, to redirect expenditure to the areas of highest priority, ensure responsible and sustainable asset management for future generations and provide customer focused service delivery.

The future of local government depends largely on its capacity to be sustainable in the long term. Council provides a wide range of services to the community and the need to effectively anticipate, plan and respond to the expectations of a changing community is imperative. Council needs to be a community champion providing leadership and vision to meet the changing community needs. The goal is to achieve a sustainable community which has social cohesion, a functional economy, a robust environment and sound infrastructure provided by good governance.

## Report Purpose

As part of the public exhibition process undertaken by Newcastle City Council for the 2009/2010 draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review, Council engaged in a community consultation program the purpose of which was to:

- Inform and educate key stakeholders and the community about the proposed changes to the draft Management Plan and recommendations from the Sustainability Review
- Establish the level of agreement in the community and identify areas of potential concern
- Seek feedback to identify potential issues which may need to be addressed by Council
- Build the relationship with the community to facilitate an ongoing dialogue with the Sustainability Review process

The key messages communicated to the community throughout the consultation program:

- The city must be able to move forward, to act,
- The city must be financially sustainable before other types of sustainability can even be considered (i.e. affordable also in social and environmental terms)
- Council is committed to working with its community to provide a sustainable future.
- Council has a strong foundation to deliver a sustainable future.
- Council is committed to the delivery of even better outcomes for the community.
- Council faces difficult choices and must be a responsible carrier of ratepayers' funds, for all citizens.

Community members and stakeholders engaged in the consultation program represented residents and ratepayers including land and business owners, and special interest groups within the local community.

The consultation program involved engagement with the community through a variety of mechanisms including:

- Distribution of media releases, community service announcements on community noticeboards, opinion pieces, advertisements and the Lord Mayor’s articles in the Post and Star newspapers.
- Distribution of a draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review poster, information/invitation postcard and information package to all local libraries, Community Forums, Mainstreet Committees and Hunter Business Chamber
- Distribution of a draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review submission form to all local libraries and made available at Council’s customer service area located in the administration building.
- On-line publication of Sustainability Review fact sheets
- Conducting Sustainability Review surveys
  - 1139 Newcastle Voice members were invited to complete the Sustainability Review survey on-line or in hard copy
  - 600 community residents (150 per ward) were invited to complete a telephone survey conducted by Key Insights on behalf of Newcastle City Council
- Council’s website and Newcastle Voice webpage and member’s portal
- Three(3) Community Ward Forums and workshops
- Quarterly ward consultation meeting in ward 3
- On-line publication of on-line form and distribution of paper submission form

## Report Inclusions

The table below lists all the methods to gather public opinion which were used in the course of this community consultation and checked items are included for analysis in this report.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Web form submissions  |   |
| Emails and email submissions received to <a href="mailto:review@ncc.nsw.gov.au">review@ncc.nsw.gov.au</a> |   |
| Written submissions/feedback forms to draft Mgt Plan and/or Sustainability Review – letters, notepads     |   |
| General correspondence to draft Mgt Plan and/or Sustainability Review                                     |   |
| Newcastle Voice Panel respondents – online  | ✓ |
| Newcastle Voice Panel respondents – print   | ✓ |
| Key Insights telephone survey (600)   | ✓ |
| Public consultation meetings - Ward forums  | ✓ |
| Public consultation meeting – ward 3 consultation meeting   | ✓ |
| Media coverage  | ✓ |

## Scope of Consultation

A number of communication tools and engagement methods were implemented as part of the draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review consultation program. The purpose of this activity is to increase the awareness in the community of the public exhibition period and to do so in a public, transparent way. Details of these are discussed below.

### Information Provided

A poster, information postcard and information package were created and distributed in all wards and community venues as well as businesses to increase awareness of the public exhibition period.

Information at the ward forums was presented visually on a series of large, full colour story boards. The posters were displayed throughout the room and were dedicated to suburb-based proposed Management Plan key projects/initiatives for 2009/2010 and included suburb maps and a Newcastle Voice participation map by ward.

[Copies of the story boards, poster, information/invitation postcard and advertisement are included for reference as Appendix V.]

### Media

Throughout the consultation program, local media was used to inform the public, about the Sustainability Review recommendations and promote ways to contribute. Specifically, the following advertisements were placed:

Newcastle Herald - 1/5/2009, 2/5/2009, 9/5/2009, 13/5/2009, 20/5/2009  
Star Newspaper – 16/5/2009, 23/5/2009, 27/5/2009, 6/5/2009  
Post Newspaper – 20/5/2009, 27/5/2009

Media releases, the Lord Mayor's Post and star newspaper articles, community service announcements and 'Next week at Council' were also created and distributed.

[Refer to Appendix V for advertisements and Appendix VII for all other media].

## Submission Form

The principal objective of this form was to reinforce Council's commitment to a transparent and community-oriented planning process by inviting the community to give their feedback and comments/suggestions to the draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review. This was instrumental to the process. The responses to this form have been captured among all submissions received.

[Refer to Appendix VI for a copy of the submission form.]

## Survey

A questionnaire was developed largely by the Sustainability review team with the objective of testing community support for the recommendations with previewed community service impact.

The survey was administered via three modes including on-line (Newcastle Voice), mail (Newcastle Voice) and telephone (Key Insights).

Key Insights was commissioned on behalf of Newcastle City Council to conduct a telephone survey of 600 Newcastle residents.

A high level of comments received (over 50% both from Newcastle Voice and Key Insights respondents) indicates a high level of community engagement with Council's activity at this time.

[Refer to Appendix I for Newcastle Voice survey method, demographics, questionnaire, and topline report. Refer to Appendix II for Key Insights survey report.]

## Ward Forums & Workshops

Organised by Newcastle Voice, three (3) ward forums were held during May to hear issues and address questions regarding the draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review. The feedback and workshops has been analysed for trends.

Invitations to the ward forums were mailed to 180 residents (Community Forum members, to the Hunter Business Chamber and the Mainstreet Committees). Invitations were also e-mailed to all Newcastle Voice members (over 1100 individuals) via e-mail as well as through the Newcastle Voice (MyVoice) newsletter.

Councillors, the General Manager and members of the Sustainability Review attended ward forums at the following locations and times:

| Ward     | Location                | Time                        |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Ward 1   | City Hall               | 13 May, 2009<br>6:00-8:00pm |
| Ward 2&3 | Newcastle Jockey Club   | 21 May, 2009<br>6:00-8:00pm |
| Ward 4   | Beresfield Bowling Club | 28 May, 2009<br>6:00-8:00pm |

Attendance at the ward forums was recorded via attendance registers. Attendance figures for each session were as follows:

13 May, 2009 ----- 21  
 21 May, 2009 ----- 51  
 28 May, 2009 ----- 24

[A copy of the ward forum agenda and the Council staff speeches, the public speeches, and the workshop exercise are included in Appendix III.]

Although the second ward council meeting in ward 3 was organised outside of the exhibition consultation program. The majority of the topics touched on the draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review, ranging from Blackbutt, parks, rates, The Loft, and sporting grounds. Over 70 members of the public attended and more than a dozen spoke.

West's League Club  
 6:30pm-8:30pm  
 26 May, 2009 ----- 75 (15 speakers)

[Transcriptions of relevant speeches relating to the draft Management Plan and Sustainability Review have been included in Appendix III.]

## Web

Information on the draft Management Plan, the Sustainability Review and the ward forums was provided on Council's website. The weekly Council e-newsletter and 'This Week At Council' also had a standing item regarding the consultation program and progress. On-line comment and submission forms were created and added to the existing Council website.

The Council website was also updated with Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) from the three ward forums, audio files of the ward speeches, and participants' feedback from the ward forums.

[Refer to Appendix IV for web metrics.]

# Sustainability Review Recommendations

The Sustainability Review recommendations were divided across four categories by the Sustainability Review team: invest, rationalise, reengineer and cease and are listed below.

## Invest

**Customer Service** – Develop a call centre to provide quicker and better response to customers, implement a customer service strategy to deliver a more focused customer service culture.

**Tourism** – Relocate the Visitor Information Centre to a more prominent location on a major arterial road and develop a new economic development strategy with tourism a major focus.

**Information technology** – Increase IT capacity to deliver better customer service through integration of systems and better take up of technology to drive productivity benefits.

## Rationalise

**Cleaning** – Centralise cleaning and presentation of beaches, toilets, building and venue cleaning and graffiti control to provide greater synergies and efficiencies. Rationalise public toilets to reduce infrastructure maintenance burden.

**Consultation** – centralise planning and management of consultation to standardise processes and procedures, fully utilise potential of Newcastle Voice to enhance transparency and awareness of consultation, cease community forums while maintaining capabilities for face to face consultation. Council has also introduced ward based community consultation meetings across the city.

**Depot** – centralise switchboard function with call centre

**Finance** – Adopt shared service model consolidating staff from across council to one area to ensure consistency and rigour in financial management.

**Legal** – adopt shared service model consolidating legal staff from across council to one area to ensure focus and value in legal spending.

**Organisation Planning** – Transfer strategic corporate planning to strategic planning area and management planning to financial services to enhance clarity of direction and performance management.

**Project Management** – Standardise methodology to enhance effectiveness and accountability.

**Training** – Centralise all training functions and budgets to focus limited training resources on organisational requirements and skill development.

## Reengineer

**Community facilities** – Review immediately with view to rationalising asset base. If asset is excess to need, sell to fund new multi-purpose centres. Bring management of all community facilities into one area.

**Fleet/Workshop** – Market test all routine fleet maintenance and tyre workshop functions, centralise fleet management and booking to minimise FBT burden, rationalise management roles and fleet utilisation.

**Parks & reserves** – Reduce service standards by one level in line with surrounding Councils. Review all pocket parks with view to rationalisation.

**Trades** – Market test all trades maintenance services. If not out-sourced, restructure to reduce management levels.

## Cease

**Community Greening Centre** – Develop a partnership with a community based organisation to take over and coordinate volunteer groups and facilitate partnerships with external service providers who engage in natural resource management activities.

**Off street parking** – Sell the three multi-level carparks which represent a significant infrastructure replacement burden. Automate if can't sell. Introduce parking fees at key beach locations considering free vouchers for residents. Investigate leasing suburban commercial car parks to private operators or introducing parking fees.

**Blackbutt reserve** - Close the animal exhibits. Change economic development focus from provider to facilitator. If not accepted, remove bird aviaries, introduce paid parking and provide a café to offset the costs of the animal exhibits.

**Youth services** – Close the youth venue to bring greater focus to facilitating other service providers to achieve better outcomes for youth rather than just focus on providing a CBD based youth arts and culture venue.

## Exclusions from survey

The Sustainability Review team identified that of these nineteen recommendations, the following are internal to Newcastle City Council's management, with no external service impact - and that no useful community input could therefore be gained:

- Legal
- Finance
- Information Technology
- Organisation Planning
- Project Management
- Training

High levels of community interest in Council's management and resource allocation however can be expected to support Council's efforts at streamlining these activities. See also headings below: Priorities, Nature of Review and Performance Culture.

This report will examine and analyse community feedback for each of the remaining recommendations, as well questions asked in the survey on council priority. Key concerns/issues captured through the open-ended component of all public opinion gathering are identified and discussed.

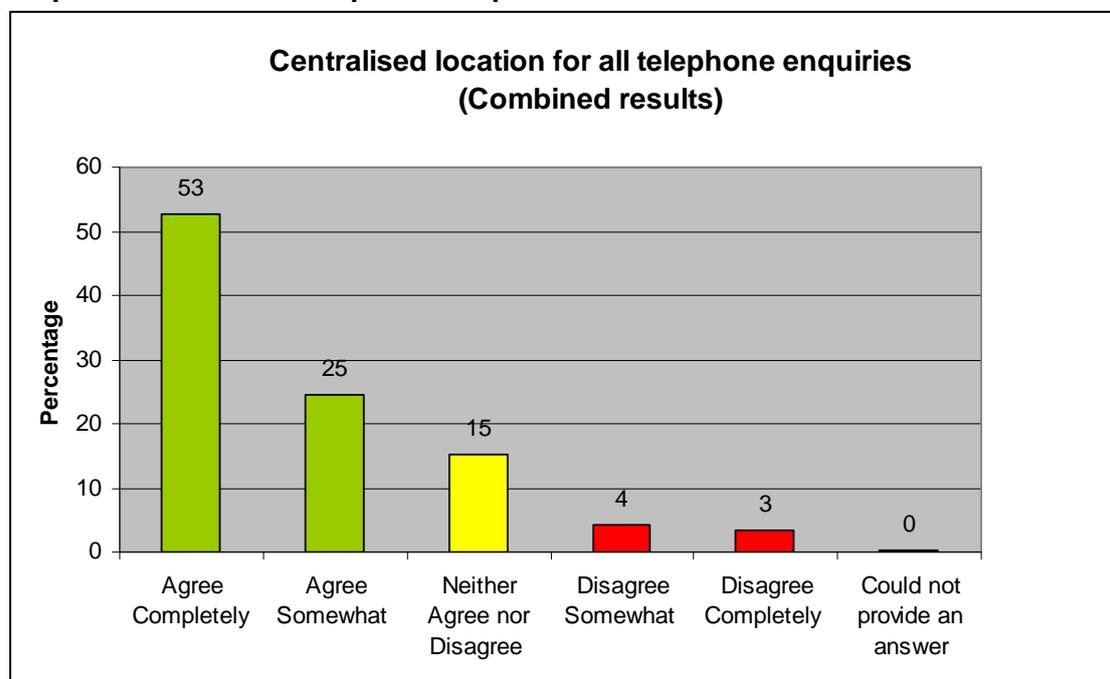
## Invest

### Customer Service

Over 77% of Newcastle Voice members and 77.4% of telephone respondents somewhat or completely agree that Newcastle City Council should provide a centralised location for all telephone enquiries to provide a better service to customers. [Refer to Graph 1]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups or suburbs.

**Graph 1: Centralised telephone enquiries**



The delivery of customer service by way of a centralised call centre was not identified as an issue with survey respondents or ward forum attendees. Customer service was ranked fifth during both the ward 1 and ward 2/3 forums, in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III]

Although no one spoke on the topic of customer service during the ward forums, much of the overall feedback was supportive of Council spending ratepayer's money on customer service, and specifically on a centralised call centre.

A few of the ward forum attendees felt that *'customer service is already well set up'* and that Council should look carefully at establishing a call-centre to ensure specialists would be accessed easily. Finally, there was great resistance to the idea of phoning an overseas call centre, as local understanding is essential to effective customer service.

The issue of 'customer service' in terms of the quality of council service delivery was received the following comments:

- "We shouldn't be discussing customer service, it's implicit to what Council should be doing" ***ward forum respondent***
- "Why haven't things been maintained properly instead of being left to deteriorate?", ***telephone survey respondent***
- "To make simpler for community and businesses – the current situation seems cumbersome" ***ward forum respondent***

It is considered that there is a level of community confusion about the *value* of customer service, and *organisational methods* of delivering it. This could easily be remedied in some of Council's regular monthly advertising and face-to-face communication activities – once the recommendations in this regard have been adopted.

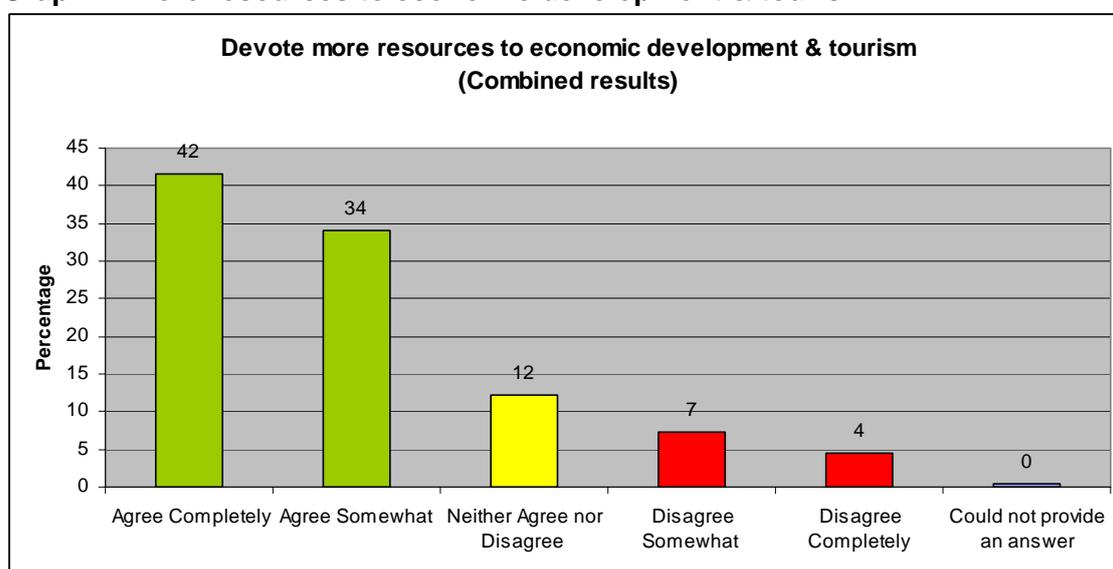
## Invest

### Tourism

Over 76% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 74.5% of telephone respondents somewhat or completely agree that Newcastle City Council should devote more resources to economic development and tourism to provide more jobs in our community. [Refer to Graph 2]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, suburbs, employment status or gender.

**Graph 2: More resources to economic development & tourism**



Tourism was a topic of concern for some of the participants of the ward forums. One person spoke specifically about tourism, while others mentioned tourism as being affected by a particular recommendation. When asked to rank tourism among nine other services, participants ranked it fourth and fifth, during both the ward 2/3 and ward 4 forums respectively, in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III]

Many of the participants who offered feedback were supportive of Council spending ratepayers' money on tourism. Specifically there was comment that in order for tourism to grow it is essential that Newcastle remain clean and attractions, such as Blackbutt, Kooragang Wetlands and the golf course remain in place and are further developed

A distinction of understanding emerged between the *overall importance* of these activities contrasted with the *importance of Newcastle City Council allocating resources* to these activities.

The following comments are indicative of opinion expressed through various mechanisms:

- “I am in the tourist business and get lots of enquiries about the disgraceful Hunter Street. Other Councils provide decent tourist information AND parking is available”, **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “This whole western green belt needs to come together as a major tourist attraction: Kooragang Wetlands, Hunter Wetland Centre, Botanic Gardens”, **ward forum respondent**
- “Tourists will come when community has achieved pride of place regardless of budget allocation by Council”, **ward forum respondent**

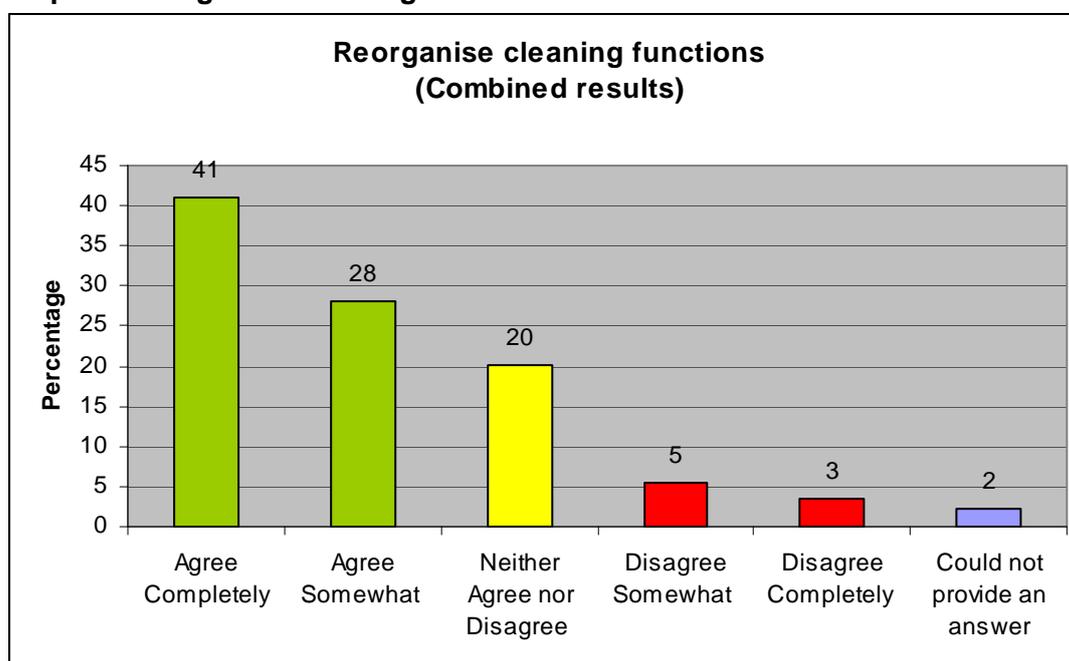
## Rationalise

### Cleaning

Over 75% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 61.2% of telephone survey respondents somewhat or completely agree that Newcastle City Council should reorganise its cleaning functions so that better services can be provided at beachside and other locations across the City. [Refer to Graph 3]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, suburbs or gender.

**Graph 3: Reorganise cleaning functions**



Cleaning was ranked as number one during both the ward 1 and ward 2/3 forums, in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III]

There was broad support for cleaning in terms of having a clean city by the participants of the ward forums. However some individuals feel that the service could be provided by an outside contractor while others question whether it could be handled effectively by another organisation. Again, a direct link between having a clean city and tourism was made by many. A sample of indicative responses:

- "Who would want to live in a city that looked untidy and not cared for? We must be able to pride ourselves on the presentation of our city", **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "Presentation is important to attract tourists and maintain assets", **ward forum respondent**

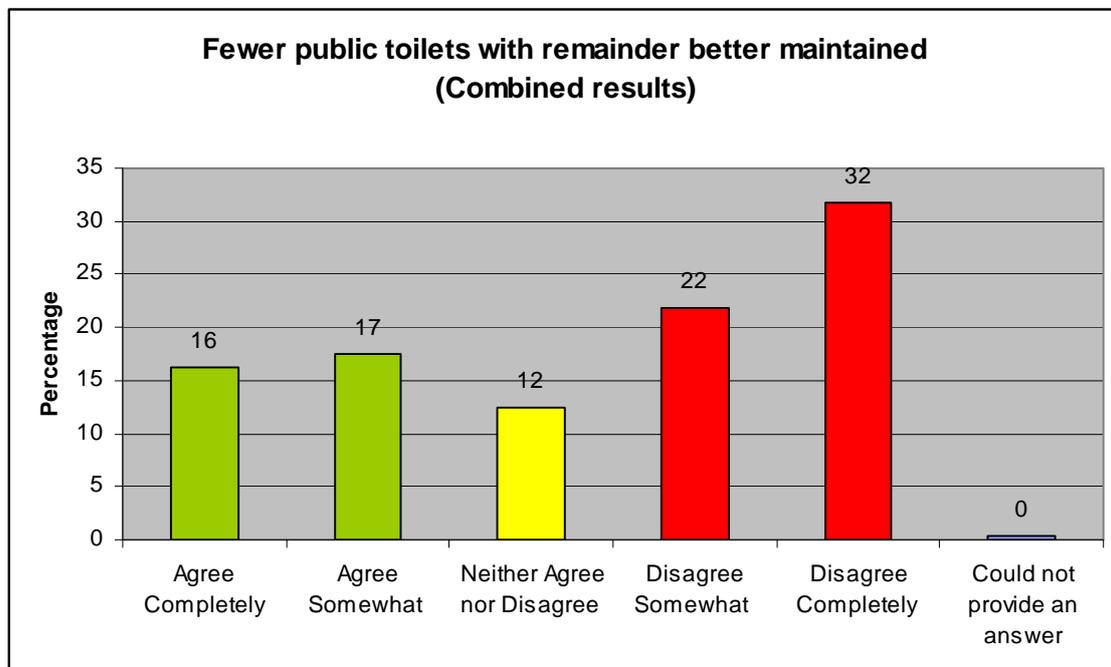
- “Glass littering many paths especially round Stockton area”, **telephone survey respondent**

However, when asked if they agreed that Newcastle City Council should have fewer public toilets if the remainder are better maintained and well located, 49.9% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 57.7% of telephone respondents somewhat or completely disagree with the recommendation. There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender or suburbs. Residents/ratepayers are divided on this recommendation. [Refer to Graph 4]

Indicative comments are provided below:

- “Public toilets should be safer places to visit for tourists and locals alike.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “Cutting back on public toilets, that's not a very wise move either. There are actually **more** needed in more appropriate locations eg Carrington Boat Ramp. This location has had a huge make-over. I can't count the number of times I've been using this great facility and seen men urinating under the bridge or against trees. If you're going to be removing public toilet blocks, put them where they are needed.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “There are too few public toilets and we need more that are not kept locked!” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

**Graph 4: Fewer public toilets**



The following comment is indicative of the concern with this question – and may go some way to explaining the wide spread of responses in the graph above:

- “These questions are leading...for example do I want less better maintained toilets. No I want more better maintained toilets.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

This stated preference for more facilities will need to be balanced against Council’s financial capacity and competing priorities.

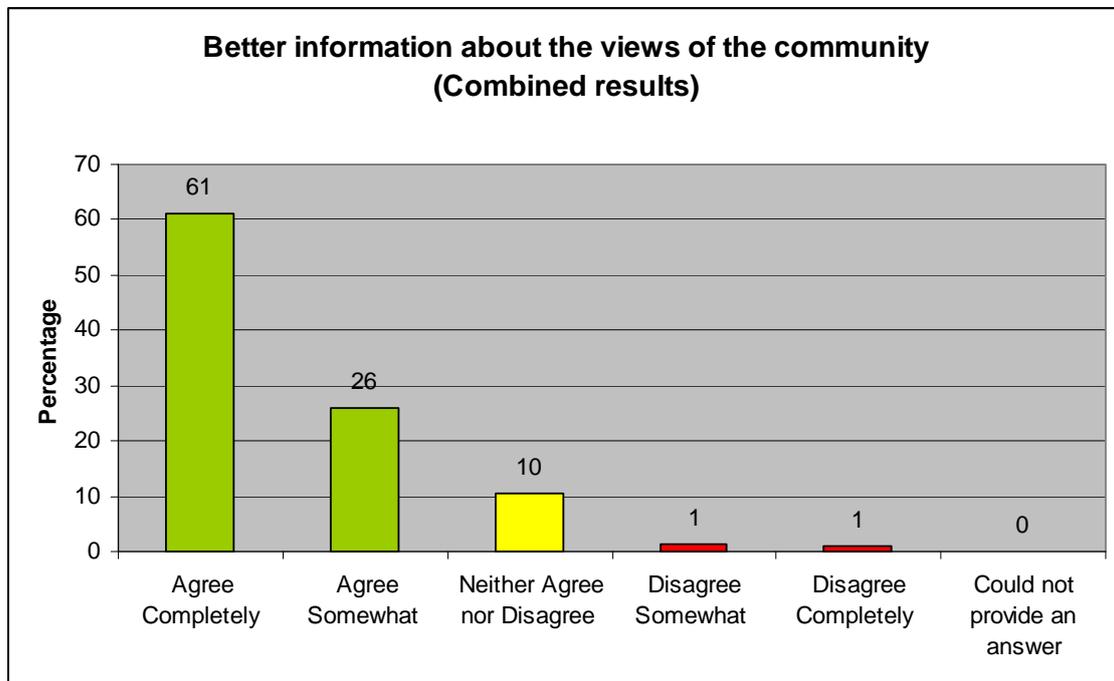
## Rationalise

### Consultation

The overwhelming majority of Newcastle Voice respondents (91.6%) and 77% of telephone respondents completely or somewhat agree that Newcastle City Council should have better information about the views of the community as a whole to inform its decision making. [Refer to Graph 5]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender or suburbs.

**Graph 5: Better information about community views**



Consultation made the top five when participants from the three ward forums were asked to rank it among nine other services, in terms of what Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III]

All were in agreement that consultation is a vital component but many mentioned that the consultation process needs to be streamlined and ratepayers need to be kept informed of what is happening in their area.

There were some individuals present who disagree strongly with the recommendation to cease Community Forums and a group of keen supporters attended and spoke at the ward forums.

A selection of responses:

- “Let’s not lose the three-dimensional real time interaction and replace it with sanitised and easier screen dialogue. We need a face to face social networking, warts and all. We’re asking you and your Council officers to be there for us because that’s what we expect of you.” **ward forum respondent**
- “I have seen other issues that are of great concern to people in my demographic (30 and under) discussed in the newspaper or decisions made at council, and I feel that there is an unbalanced demonstration of viewpoints from certain sectors. I genuinely appreciate the Newcastle Voice panel, and I do hope you find its feedback rewarding and beneficial.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Suggest quarterly seminars to be held by Council to all Voice participants and partners to be held at central locations to discuss a specific proposal by Council e.g. recreational facilities, parks and beaches.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Maintain good community contact in decision making.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “Critical for Council to know what community needs and wants.” **ward forum respondent**
- I submit that the operation of the community forum be retained within Newcastle Voice.’ **ward forum respondent**

## Re-engineer

### Community Facilities

Opinion was divided on the issue of community halls with no clear indication of preference from the community. On balance, residents/ratepayers lean more towards agreement versus disagreement of the recommendation.

More than 50% of Newcastle Voice respondents somewhat or completely agree that Newcastle City Council should have fewer community halls, but they should be of a higher standard and better located.

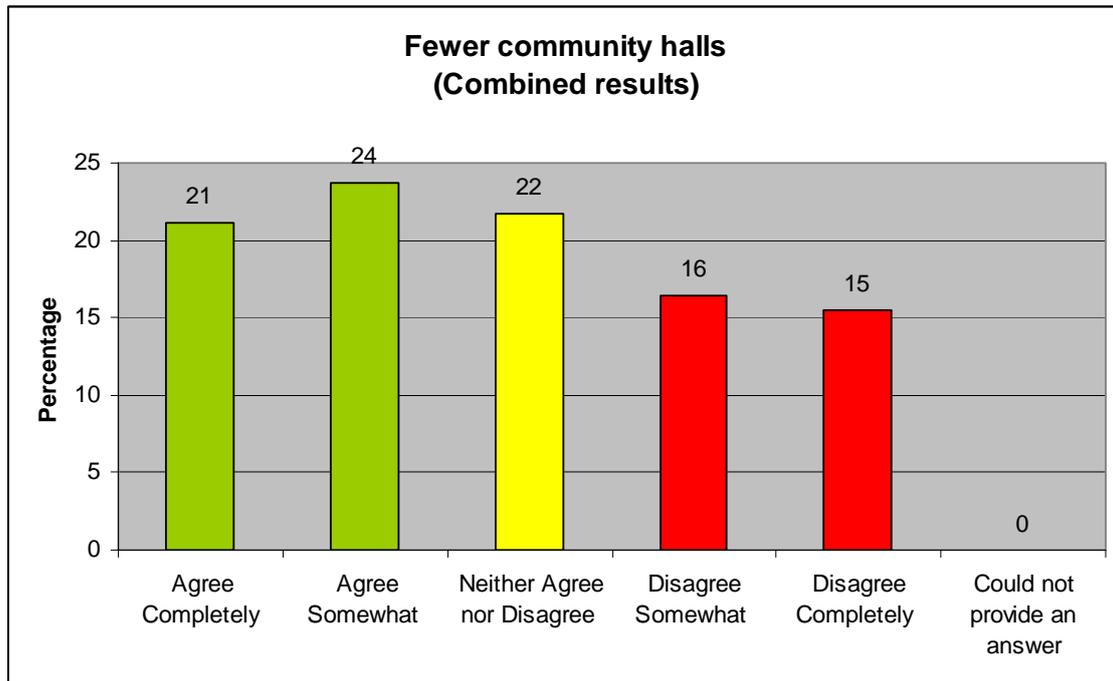
In this instance, only 37.9% of telephone respondents somewhat or completely agreed to reduce the number of community halls. However, only 31% disagree with the statement. That is because nearly double (31%) of telephone respondents neither agree nor disagree or could not answer the question, compared to Newcastle Voice members (16.87%) who neither agree nor disagree with the statement. [Refer to Graph 6]

The results from the Newcastle Voice survey revealed that some suburbs had a greater number of respondents who disagree (somewhat or completely) with the recommendation. They are:

| Suburb             | % Somewhat/Completely Disagree |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Adamstown          | 50                             |
| Birmingham Gardens | 73                             |
| Hamilton North     | 83                             |
| Mayfield West      | 71                             |
| Minmi              | 80                             |
| Newcastle West     | 66                             |
| Wallsend           | 56                             |
| Waratah            | 53                             |
| Waratah West       | 83                             |

However, the above mentioned suburbs cover all four wards. There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender or employment status.

**Graph 6: Fewer community halls**



Community facilities was ranked as fifth and third during the Ward 2/3 and Ward 4 forums, respectively, in terms of what Council should be spending ratepayers' money on. [Refer to Appendix III]

Many of the participants expressed concerns about the condition of existing community facilities stating that they were '*desperately in need of upgrades*'; and agreed that it is an area that could be changed as a lot of buildings are under utilised and therefore the cost to maintain them is not justified.

There is support for improved management of the community halls, with concrete suggestions of what that might mean coming from some quarters:

- "Our community forum is run in a church hall where Council pays rent, yet there's a community hall right in the same area. That could be better managed." **ward forum respondent**
- "Help young people and the elderly: more, better community spaces, halls etc." **telephone survey respondent**
- "Run these sessions with an in-house facilitator in community halls!" **ward forum respondent**

## Re-engineer

### Fleet/Workshop

No specific fleet/workshop questions were asked in the Sustainability Review survey conducted during the exhibition period as this was deemed an internal service with no community service impact.

Several comments addressed Council's fleet – along the lines of Council prioritisation of expenditure:

- “The Council should seriously look at rationalising and reducing its fleet of cars. The Council should own only a limited pool of hybrid cars - used for council business only.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Spending \$20,000 on green fleet is a mistake, when we plant so many trees out here at Kooragang – that’s carbon sequestration.” **ward forum respondent**

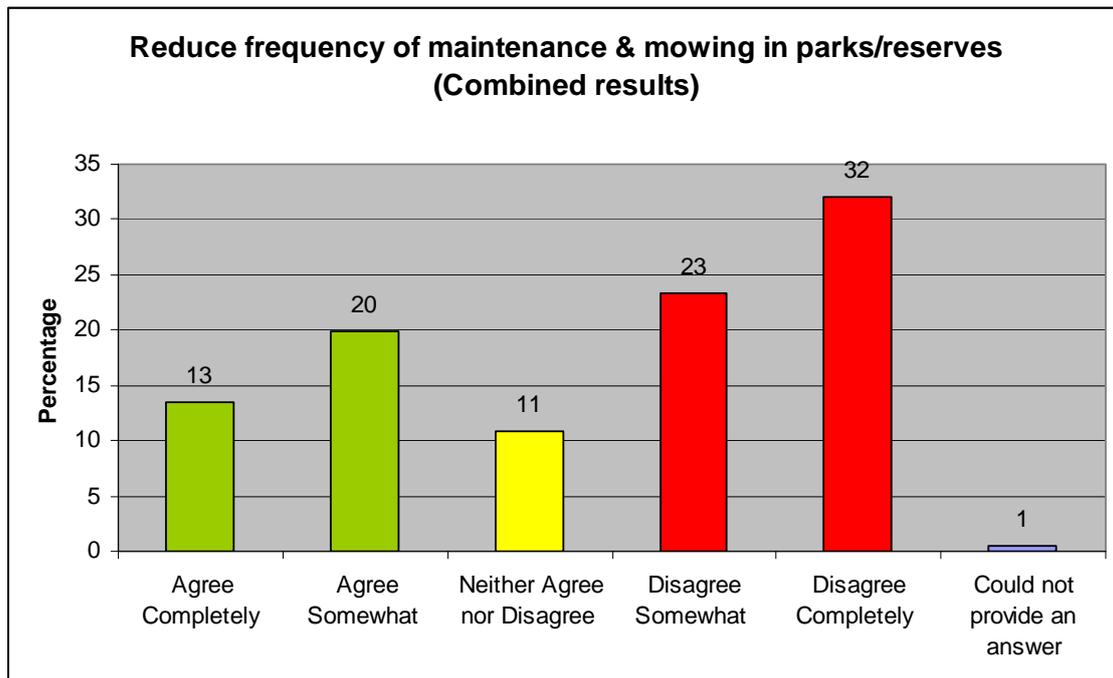
This recommendation enjoys implicit support, based on the numbers and types of responses received regarding Council's overall priorities: In short, the community supports Council getting its own house in order and spending its funds more wisely.

## Re-engineer

### Parks & Reserves

Generally, the community is divided on this question. More Newcastle Voice respondents disagree (49.65%) than agree (40.52%) with the recommendation to reduce the frequency of mowing and maintenance in parks and reserves to bring them in line with neighboring councils and save \$750,000. Similarly, more telephone respondents (62.1%) disagree with the recommendation. [Refer to Graph 7]

**Graph 7: Reduce mowing & maintenance at parks/reserves**



There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender or employment status.

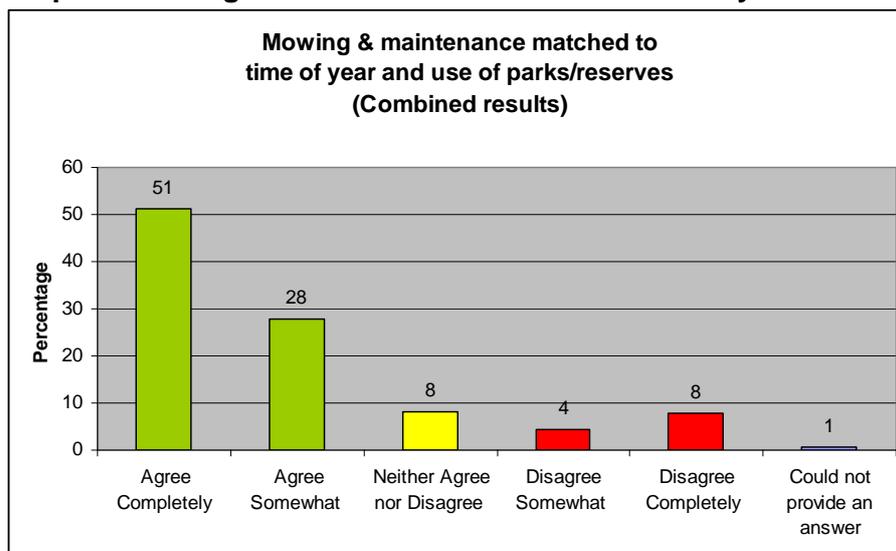
Parks and reserves was ranked as second and first during the ward 1 and ward 2/3 forums respectively in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III] A number of individuals spoke on the topic of parks and reserves with respect to the recommendation in the Sustainability Review. Participants also discussed parks and reserves during the workshop sessions and how maintenance goes hand in hand with Pride of Place and tourism. Some participants suggested that maintaining parks and reserves, although important, could be contracted out while others did not think it could be handled by any other organisation. Many stated that they want parks and reserves to be kept at the same maintenance level and were willing to volunteer to mow the lawns if necessary.

Indicative comments from the consultation:

- “Parks and beaches are critical assets for both residents and visitors and should therefore be maintained at the highest quality.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Please maintain our sporting grounds. In an age where we have increasing obesity in our youth we need to keep encouraging outdoor activity. It is also important for our economic viability to maintain the highest level of sporting venues.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Parks and gardens needs to be done. NCC would not benefit by putting out to privatization.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “Operators in neighbouring Councils are envious of the way NCC presents its foreshore and parks. I spent Good Friday at Speers Point Park and grass up around my ankles...[we should] not lower our standards to theirs.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “I think small parks are going to be more and more essential as our very small amount of green space in the urban environment.” **ward forum respondent**
- “My concern about the pocket parks and any intent to sell them off or change them in any way is that they also provide important green corridors for wildlife.” **ward forum respondent**

When asked if they agree that mowing and park maintenance should be matched to the time of year and the use of parks and reserves, 73.77% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 79.7% of telephone respondents agree with the recommendation. [Refer to Graph 8]

**Graph 8: Mowing & maintenance matched to time of year and usage**



## Cease

### Community Greening Centre

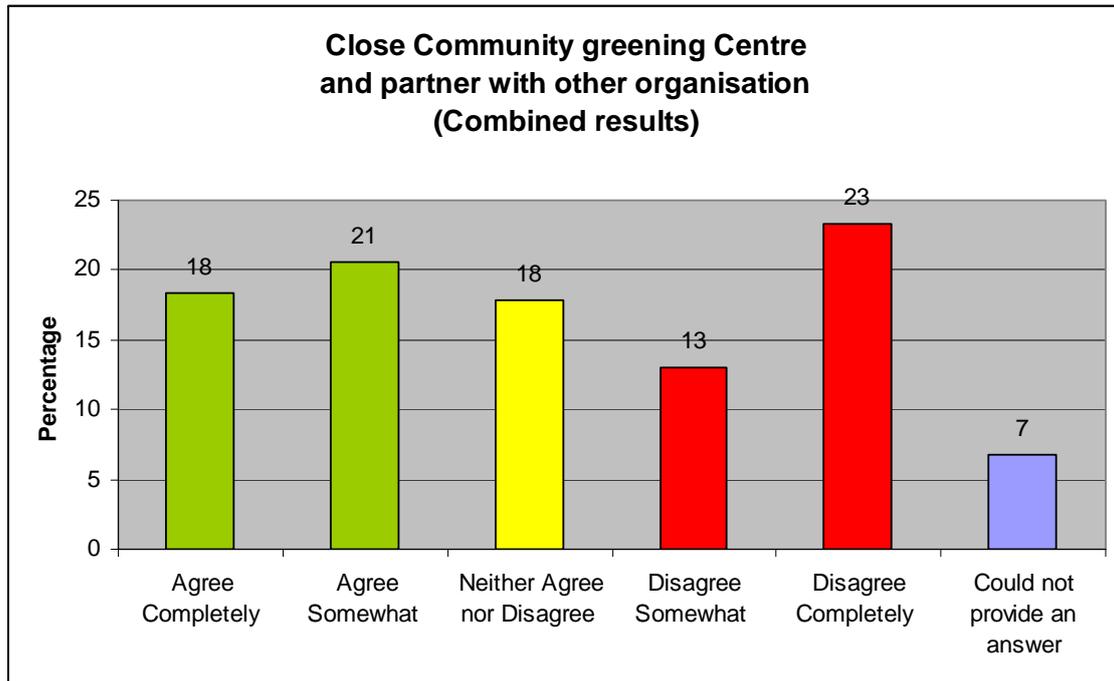
Only 45.22% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 31.4% of telephone respondents agree that Newcastle City Council should close the Community Greening Centre, saving \$550,000 and instead partner with another organisation to provide community greening services. Over 54% of Newcastle Voice and 61.5% of telephone respondents either have no opinion or disagree with the recommendation. On balance, residents/ratepayers lean more towards agreement versus disagreement of the recommendation. [Refer to Graph 9]

There are no significant differences when looking at different age groups, however, responses by employment status reveals that Newcastle Voice respondents who work part-time were more inclined to disagree 'somewhat' or 'completely' (38%) versus agree 'somewhat' or 'completely' (18%) to the recommendation, compared to any other employment status. Furthermore, of the Newcastle Voice respondents who answered that they completely agree with the recommendation (21.85%), males represented 63% versus females (37%).

The Community Greening Centre was ranked third, fourth and fifth during the three ward forums, in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III] Half a dozen ward participants spoke passionately about the Community Greening Centre and the uncertainty of partnering with another organisation and the implications that would have to the current volunteers. Many of the participants expressed concerns with the recommendation stating that it is a vitally important service with amazing potential and if the recommendation was passed, it would lose its focus. However, others are of the mind that the Community Greening Centre's costs outweigh the value it brings and competes with other core services and therefore should be run by private industry. Below are indicative comments:

- "I am appalled at the notion of axing this from Council services given the thousands of volunteers providing many thousands of hours labour to keep existing parks, dune areas well-maintained and establishing new parks e.g. Cowper St. Carrington. No local private organisation has the capacity to coordinate this large taskforce whilst Council runs it with just 5 fulltime staff - value for money indeed in terms of community/neighbourhood cohesion and general appearance of the whole of LGA!" **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "We also want to remember that with another Coal Loader going in and our 'carbon footprint' via our coal exports, we wish to continue with our Greening Centre as a means of offsetting the impact on our city, communities and the environment we live in." **Newcastle Voice respondent**

**Graph 9: Close Community Greening Centre and partner with other providers**



Part of the spread in responses can be explained by confusion about which organisation would be partnered with, and how that would change operations. Comments received reflect this:

- “Questions regarding items such as the community greening centre should include a link to information about such services in order to facilitate informed answers.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Cease

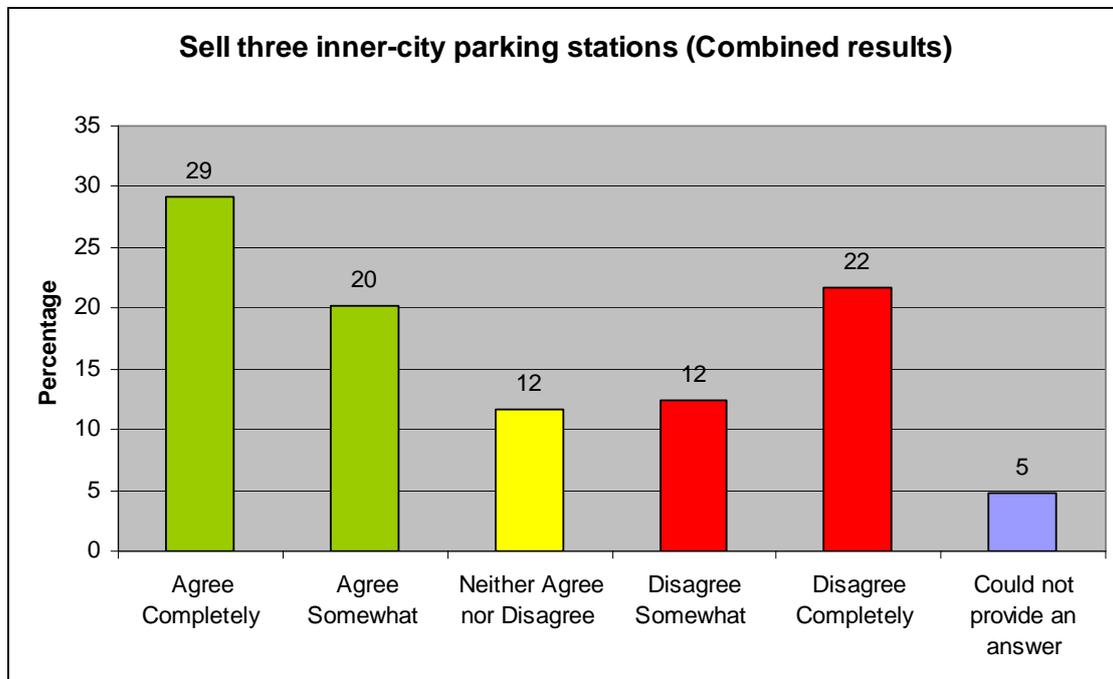
### Parking

Sixty-five percent (65.1%) of Newcastle Voice respondents somewhat or completely agree with the recommendation to sell Council's three multilevel carparks in the city which have reached the end of their lives and would cost Council \$39 million dollars to replace.

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender or employment status. Of those Newcastle Voice respondents who 'somewhat' or 'completely' disagree (25.72%), 25% of respondents are from Merewether (Ward 2), 16% of respondents are from Cooks Hill (Ward 1) and 12% are from New Lambton (Ward 3).

A greater number of telephone survey respondents, compared to Newcastle Voice respondents, were opposed to the recommendation to sell Council's three multilevel carparks (44.2% compared to 25.72% respectively). This is an unusual result, as the remainder of the survey questions identified similar results between the Newcastle Voice and telephone survey respondents. The discrepancy between this question's result may be due to the fact that Newcastle Voice had a broader representation of full and part-time workers (73.46%) compared to Key Insights (40.5%). [Refer to Graph 10]

**Graph 10: Sell inner-city parking stations**



Parking was identified as the number one issue for Newcastle at one table at the Ward 1 Forum with concerns that paid parking hampers economic activity in the Newcastle CBD. There was also talk about the need for increased residential parking particularly in the inner city and the need for Council to invest in both commercial and residential parking.

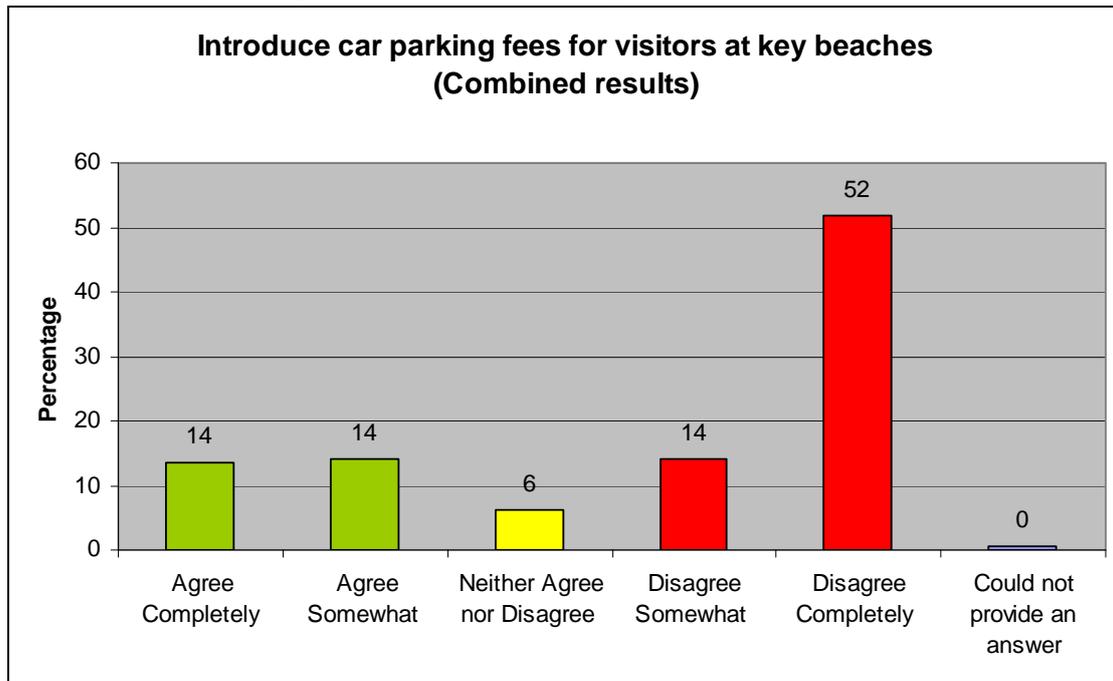
Although parking was considered a hot topic during all of the three ward meetings, and several individuals spoke about parking formally, parking did not rate among the top five when attendees were asked to rank the service, in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III]

Parking generated much interest and made up 6% of the overall comments received from the survey. Many commented on the need for free parking in the city and at beaches as a *core* service to encourage tourism.

- "I think you should foot the bill for whatever upgrades are needed on the current parking lots, or stage developments to be more manageable, but you will cop a lot of criticism for selling off parking lots and then raising revenue with council parking meters to go to the beach!" **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "There's just no parking in the city, you can't go in there." **ward forum respondent**
- "I think that all parking in the CBD and surrounding areas should have no parking fees attached so that this will increase people to the area. We need more people in the CBD area to spend money." **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "Council generally gets things right, but parking in city is not good enough! Don't sell car parks and more car spaces needed." **telephone survey respondent**
- "Does Council not understand that the cost of parking in the CBD & beach area is already a major deterrant to people visiting the city? Do something worthwhile for once & get rid of the meters all together!" **Newcastle Voice respondent**

However, when asked if they agree that Newcastle City Council should introduce car parking fees for visitors, with free permits for locals, at key beaches to improve beachside facilities, 64.73% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 67.2% of telephone respondents disagree (somewhat or completely) with the recommendation. There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender, suburbs or employment status. [Refer to Graph 11]

**Graph 11: Car parking fees for visitors at key beaches**



In terms of introducing parking fees at key beaches, participants were divided, with some commenting '*beaches belong to everyone and should be free!*'; and others stating that '*Council should provide beach parking but charge a non-resident fee.*'

- "If we intend to invite tourists to our city, parking in the city and at the beaches must be either free or very affordable and for long enough periods that they do not have to worry about parking fines", **Newcastle Voice respondent**

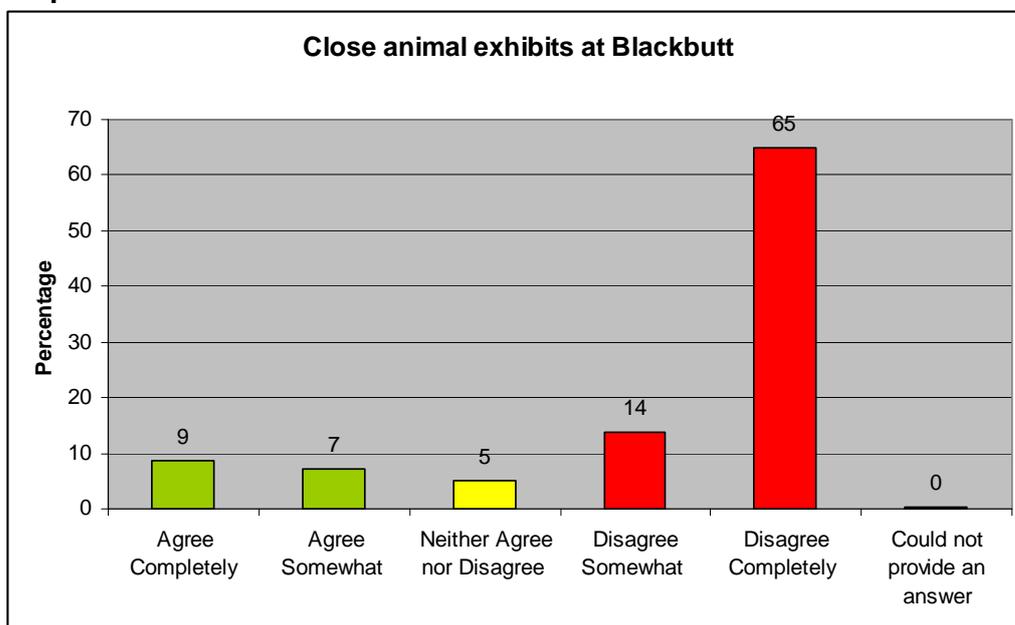
## Cease

### Parks & Reserves - Blackbutt

Over 75% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 82.1% of telephone respondents disagree with the recommendation that Newcastle City Council should close the animal exhibits at Blackbutt saving \$500,000 and leave Blackbutt as our premium bushland reserve while still incorporating the existing picnic areas and playground. [Refer to Graph 12]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, gender, suburbs or employment status.

**Graph 12: Close animal exhibits at Blackbutt**

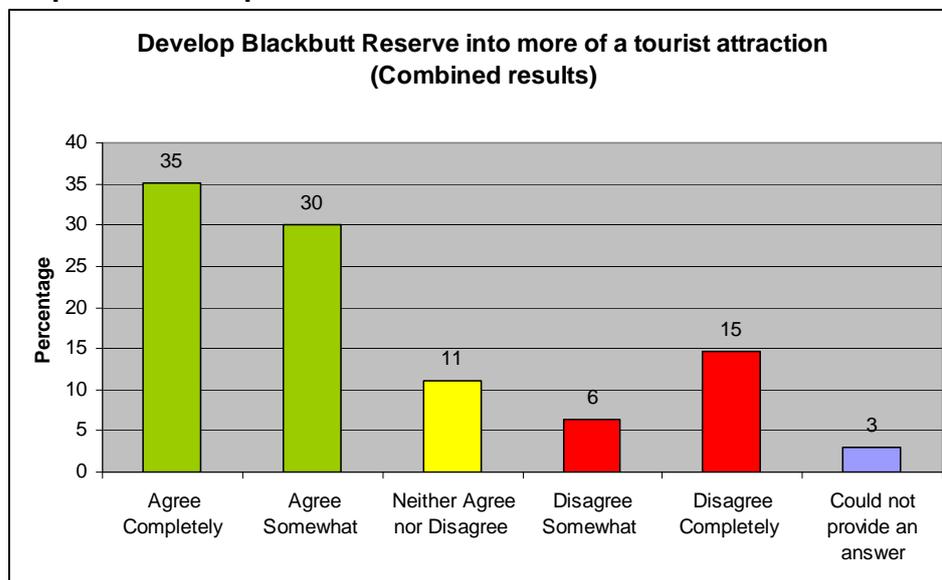


Blackbutt was ranked second during the ward 2/3 forum, in terms of what Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III] Half a dozen ward participants spoke passionately about Blackbutt. Some of the ward forum participants mentioned the need to *'partner with others including other government agencies'* and keep the animal exhibit open as it is a tourist venue and learning centre for children.

- “Blackbutt reserve animals should stay - they are a key tourist attraction. More imagination needs to be applied to creating fund-raising ventures there such as cafe, souvenirs etc. Think how much might be raised by selling Blackbutt snowdomes”, **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Blackbutt needs to keep animal exhibits. It would not be worth visiting without it.” **telephone survey respondent**

When asked if Council should invest further funds to develop Blackbutt Reserve into more of a tourist attraction on the basis that this investment would be fully recovered by appropriate fees, nearly 70% (69.67%) of Newcastle Voice respondents and 63.7% of telephone respondents agree with the recommendation. [Refer to Graph 13]

**Graph 13: Develop Blackbutt into more of a tourist attraction**



There is some uniformity of public opinion with over 6% of overall comments being about the future of Blackbutt Reserve and the need for further development to ensure the animal exhibits remain:

- “Blackbutt Reserve has for generations been part of Newcastle. Under no circumstances should it be changed and definitely no fees charged”, **telephone survey respondent**
- “I do not agree with spending substantial money on Blackbutt without guaranteed return. Try an admission charge/parking”, **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “I pay nothing to go to the Botanical Gardens in Sydney, I pay absolutely nothing to go to the Botanical Gardens in Brisbane and these are all Council funded and are free to the public. Now Newcastle has its own gem, you can forget about the Queens Wharf, the true gem is in fact at Blackbutt Reserve.” **ward forum respondent**
- “Parking meters to support Blackbutt, keep the animals”, **telephone survey respondent**
- “Blackbutt is a great asset to the City and Council should investigate a suitable commercial or corporate sponsor before closing it down, however I don't feel that it is a core function of council responsibility to continue to fund its operation”, **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Cease

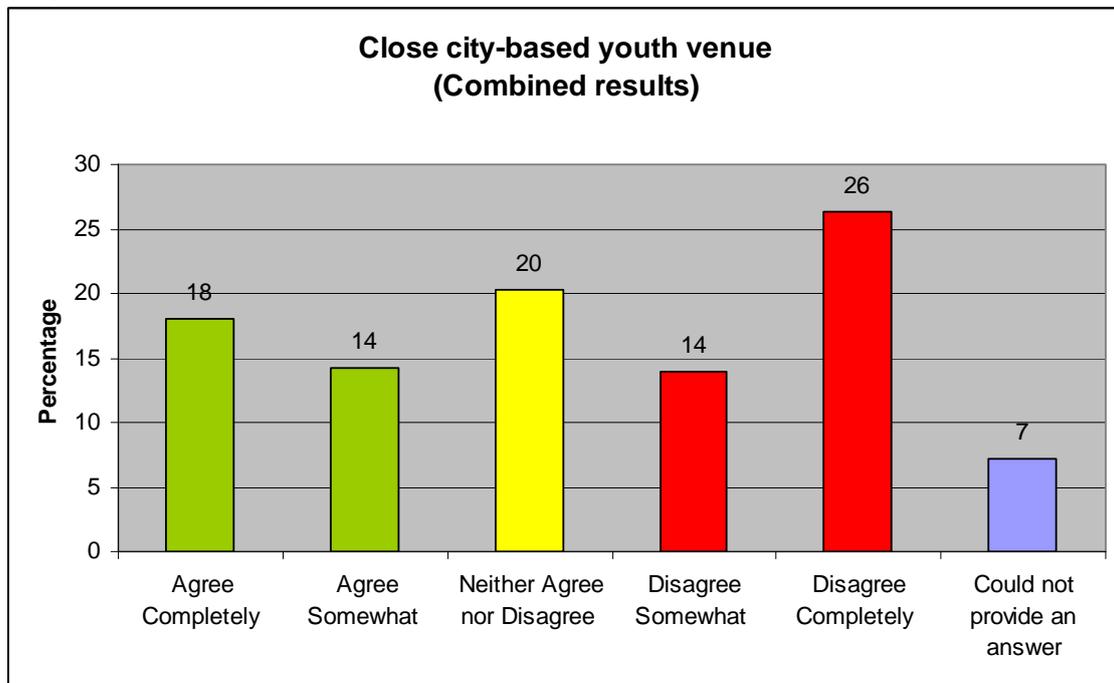
### The Loft Youth Centre

On balance, respondents to this question are divided in terms of the recommendation that The Loft be closed, so that limited resources can be used to facilitate activities for youth across the whole LGA. Respondents are split 40%-44% between those who agree and those who disagree.

Although a greater number of telephone respondents disagree (36.2%) than agree (22.6%), over 40% of these respondents could not provide an answer or neither agree nor disagree with the recommendation. [Refer Graph 14]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, genders, suburbs or employment status.

**Graph 14: Close city-based youth venue**



Youth services were ranked second and first during the ward 1 and ward 4 forums, in terms of where Council should be spending ratepayers' money. [Refer to Appendix III]

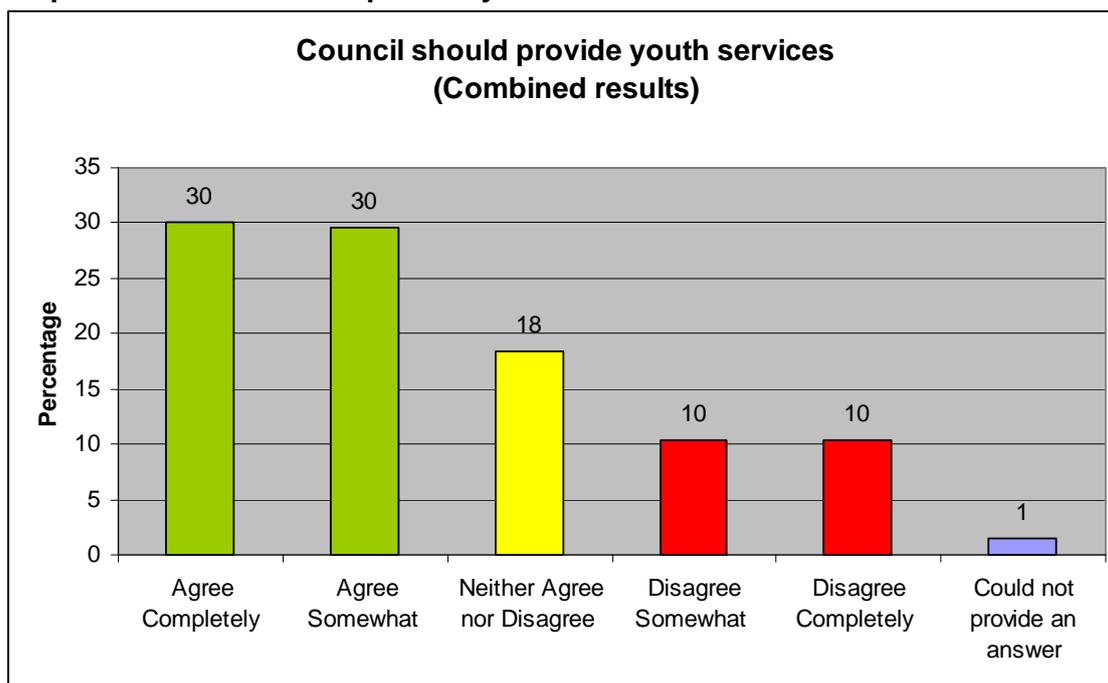
Newcastle Voice and the telephone survey generated the following range of responses. Although very few people spoke on The Loft and youth services in general, the topic was discussed during table discussions in Ward Forums.

- “Please do not close any youth venues, keeping youth occupied keeps them out of trouble and thus our city clean. Thankyou.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “The LOFT Youth Venue has not been very successful and the money could be used in other services for youth in many different locations.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Don’t even think about closing the Loft.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “The Loft needs to stay in the city centre – it provides an alcohol-free environment.” **ward forum respondent**
- “I think it’s a really important asset, it provides a really positive, meaningful and creative space for a lot of youth.’ **ward forum respondent**

When asked to what extent do you agree that it is appropriate for Newcastle City Council to be providing youth services given the existing welfare and government supported services elsewhere in the community, 60.44% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 58.6% of telephone survey respondents agree (somewhat or completely).

Of those Newcastle Voice respondents who ‘completely’ or ‘somewhat’ agree with the recommendation (60.44%), females represented the majority in all age groups, with the exception of the 70+ age group.

**Graph 15: Council should provide youth services**



Some ward forum participants supported the recommendation that Council only facilitate youth services, with other organisations managing and implementing those services. It should not be ‘a core activity for Council.’

- “It is important to support youth in the community”, **ward forum respondent**
- “Re the youth venue in the city, I would like to see greater resources out towards Ward 4 especially in the growth areas of young people in Blue Gum Hills.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Other Subjects Raised

### Council Priorities

This area generated most interest from public opinion gathering – through every medium – Newcastle Voice (22% of all comments), by telephone or face to face. The comments fall into the following four areas: inner city revitalisation, service cuts versus internal efficiency, service cuts vs unused assets and core responsibilities versus special projects.

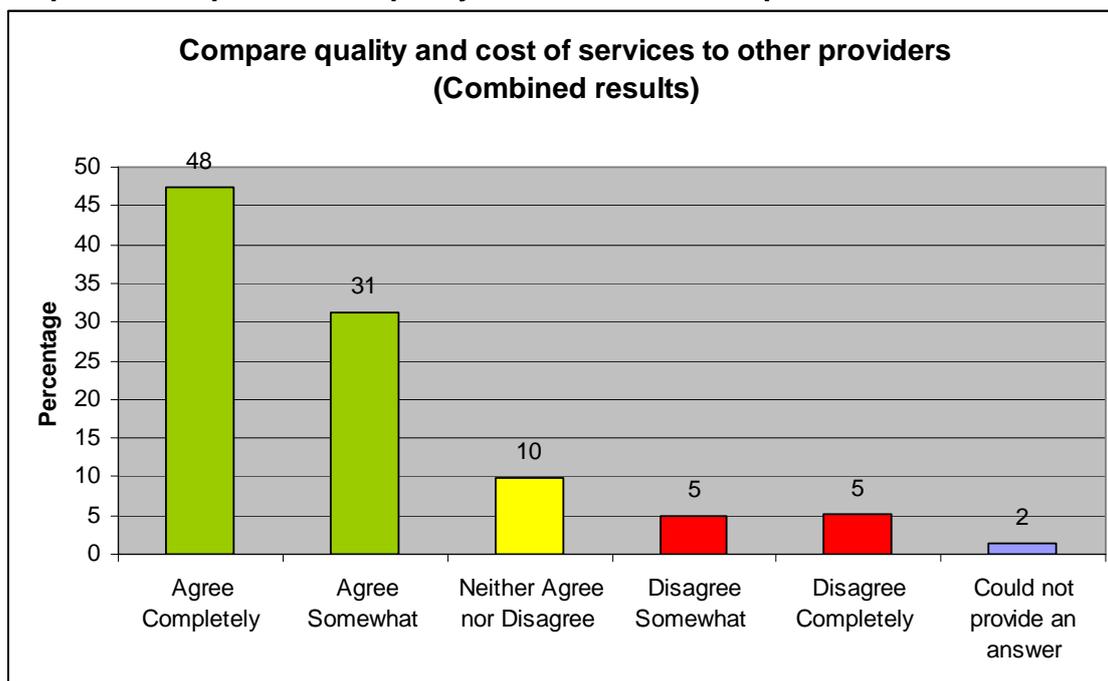
#### Inner city revitalisation

- “The CBD is an embarrassment to the city especially as cruise ships visit.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “The CBD is a rundown, crumbling disgrace. Rehabilitation has concentrated only on the waterfront. It is the heart of the CBD and Hunter Street which are crying out for renewal. The owners of the decaying, ugly buildings must be pressured to upgrade or sell to allow renewal.” **online survey respondent**
- “It appears Newcastle is a slum town judging by Hunter Street.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “CBD needs massive revitalisation, reduce property rents to stimulate new business.” **telephone survey respondent**

#### Service cuts vs. internal efficiency

Over 84% (84.51%) of Newcastle Voice respondents and 71.7% of telephone respondents agree (somewhat or completely) that Newcastle City Council should compare the cost and quality of its services with other providers to ensure that they represent value for money for the ratepayers of Newcastle. [Refer to Graph 16]

**Graph 16: Compare cost & quality of services to other providers**



Comments received through consultation support the chart above:

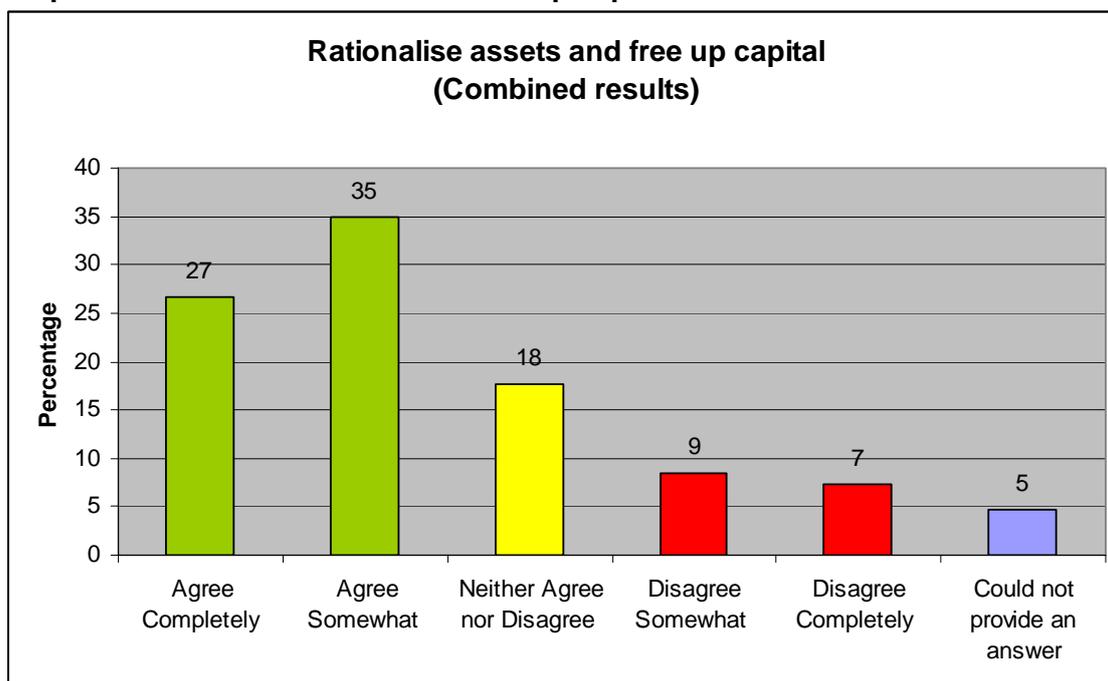
- “You need to make hard decisions, stand by them and get something done to improve Newcastle’s development rate, public buildings which are disgraceful , parks and facilities for recreation.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “If every service is privatised or contracted out why do we have a need for Council?” **telephone survey respondent**
- “What are all the funds spent on presently? Maybe we need less councillors.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “Cut down on the staff at Town Hall then I am sure there would be money for the community.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Stop overseas trips. Don’t close public pools.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “STOP asking for money from us.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “I am young and it seems that we pay to use enough already.” **Telephone survey respondent**
- “Just do the basics, roads, paths, parks & forget large projects.” **Newcastle Voice survey respondent**
- “Compare and present information gathered to those responsible for services to work through methods to become competitive with high standards.”  
Newcastle Voice respondent

## Service cuts vs. unused assets

When asked if they agree that Newcastle City Council should rationalise its assets and free up capital by partnering with other government, community and private service providers, 69% of Newcastle Voice respondents and 52.8% of telephone survey respondents agree. [Refer to Graph 17]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, genders, suburbs or employment status.

**Graph 17: Rationalise assets and free up capital**



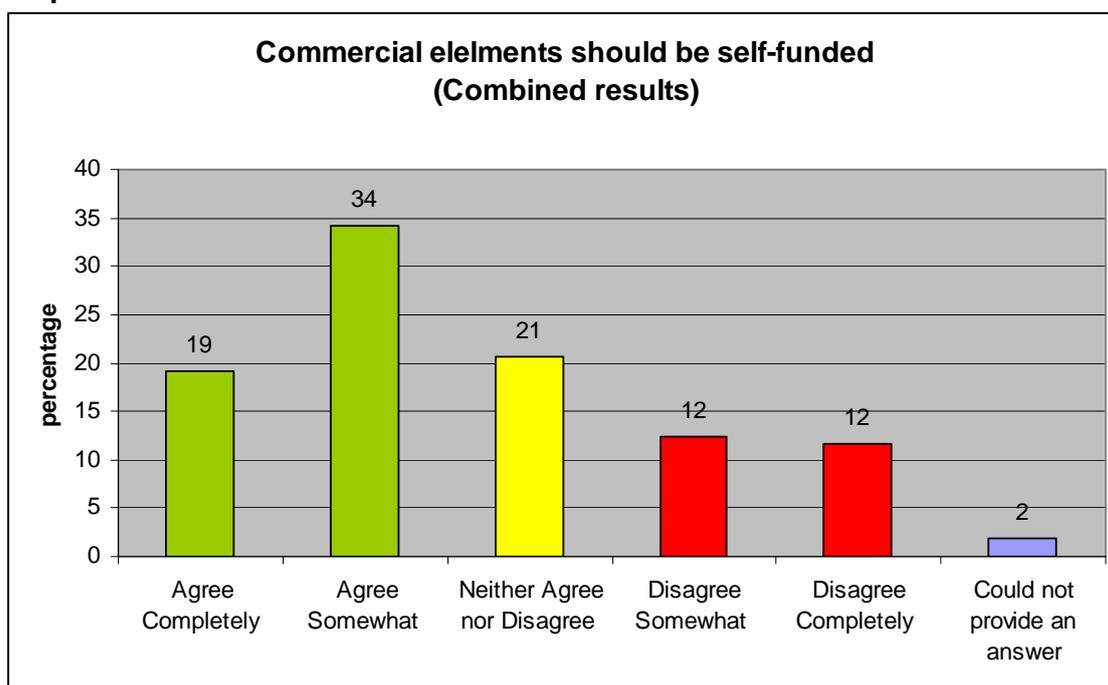
The following indicative comments support the chart above:

- “Sell all disused properties in city area.” **telephone survey respondent**
- “I would be more supportive of council's reviews if it included selling things like the golf course and hotel sites it owns before trying to cut back other areas like Blackbutt and park maintenance.” **online survey respondent**
- “Sell council property/buildings that are not being used, for example old library building in Wallsend.” **telephone survey respondent**

Over 59% (59.61%) of Newcastle Voice respondents agree (somewhat and completely) with the principle that Council services with commercial elements should be self-funded. Similarly, more of the telephone respondents agree (35.8%) versus disagree (30.5%) with the principle that Council services with commercial elements should be self-funded. [Refer to Graph 18]

There are no significant differences to report when looking at the different age groups, or employment status. However, of the Newcastle Voice respondents who 'somewhat' agree with the recommendation (40.11%), males represented the majority in all age groups.

**Graph 18: Commercial elements should be self-funded**



Again, comments received from qualitative components illustrate the range of views leading to the chart above:

- “Just because private sector operators may be providing a particular service to wealthier members of our community, doesn't mean there is no need for a council-run facility for poorer members of the community e.g. public pools”, **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Core responsibilities vs. special projects

- “In my opinion Councils need to get back to their "core business", and get away from doing projects that other levels of Government do better. Also I'd like to see the Council NOT run businesses but earn passive income streams from their assets.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “I see Council's primary function as providing basic services, maintaining parks/beaches/sporting facilities/community halls etc. Tourism, welfare support and other activities are the responsibility of commercial organisations and state/federal governments. Council should concentrate on its primary functions and not try to spread its activities so far.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Nature of Review

Of the comments received in ward forums, through the Newcastle Voice survey (54 comments) and in the telephone survey (1 comment), a significant number addressed the nature of the current review, in terms of timeliness, perceived scope and definition. Other comments addressed items not under review at this time such as waste services; or completely outside Council's range of responsibility such as the rail line and the State Member for Newcastle.

### Timeliness

There is significant support for this review occurring now, occurring swiftly, and occurring comprehensively - as the following indicative comments illustrate:

- "Thank you for doing this survey, I wanted the opportunity to comment."  
**Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "Keep it up, keep talking to us and when the tough decisions need to be made tell us why and indicate the alternatives." **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "The whole review is clearly overdue. If tough decisions need to be made, then let's make them quick." **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "It's about time Council stopped pandering to the vocal minorities who try to put themselves above everyone else and resist any change to protect their own patch. Congratulations to Council for trying to listen to all the voices and not just the loud and shrill ones." **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- "Let's see the new Councillors support the new GM and implement and support the difficult decisions that need to made." **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Perceived Scope

In the table exercise held during ward forums, one of the most common difficulties was ranking the services under review – with concerns at the narrow scope, supporting comments below from the Newcastle Voice respondents about the scope of the review:

- “Has a rationalisation of staff functions, salaries and wages as well as staff numbers been carried out?” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “I find it interesting that the sustainability review has highlighted a lot of 'big ticket' or highly visible organisations or functions for cost savings.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “I cannot see why the Council is in the business of running a golf course at a loss. I think it is fine to provide such services but not at a loss. If the issue is whether the Council should provide services such as Blackbutt at a loss then surely the Art Gallery, Libraries, Civic Theatre, Fort Scratchley, Museum should also be considered for closure.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “The promise of no net job losses is inappropriate. If the reports find inefficiencies and ways to save costs by reforming processes, savings may well be achieved on the payroll. The community may well support management if it takes on the unions.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Council seems to spend time and money 'beautifying' areas by replacing existing facilities that are functioning with new. I cite as an example the recent replacement of the tables and bench seats along the foreshore at Bar Beach. I wonder how much money could be saved at ground level of council's operations if such issues were included in the review.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “What sort of 'community' do you have left when you've sold off all the assets and shut down all the services - put the bloody rates up for heavens sake!” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

## Definitions

Some of the concern relates to the notion of sustainability, which is defined in some quarters as financial, social and environmental sustainability.

- “It is an odd name for a financial review looking towards a rationalisation of services.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “You haven't mentioned any level of environmental sustainability. That would be a good place to start.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “I do not agree that this is a 'sustainability review', as it seems to be about privatising Council services and finding a basis to reallocate money in order to essentially give less back to the community. Questions that are gauging feedback for a sustainability review should have a solid focus on community, environmental AND economic aspects, rather than just economic ones.” **Newcastle Voice respondent.**

Some of these matters can be raised operationally as the review moves into assessing the balance of service areas.

It is considered that these matters may also be addressed in strategic communications during the remainder of the Sustainability Review.

## Council's Performance Culture

A number of remarks in all qualitative consultation methods (Newcastle Voice 30 of 732 respondents, telephone survey 48 of 601 respondents) addressed Council's own performance culture. The comments ranged across the elected Councillors and the administration, confirming the notion that, in the public eye, there is only one Newcastle City Council.

The following comments illustrate the breadth of comments, which fall into three broad categories – expenditure, quality and timeliness.

### Expenditure

- “Lets look at the travel costs of council staff attending overseas symposiums and stop this before even discussing closing the animal exhibitions at Blackbutt etc.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “A complete review of council staff perks should be taken and any perks should be justified. (ie cars/parking etc).” Newcastle Voice respondent
- “I think the council should pay more attention to streamlining its administrative activities to save money before it considers privatising assets or charging fees for currently free services.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**

### Quality

- “Councillors need to do their jobs better and stop wasting time, money and resources”, **telephone survey respondent**
- “There are a lot of good people out there capable of working for the good of all - lets start employing them and get rid of costly outside services”. **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Cut your bureaucracy. You have far more employees than Lake Macquarie and they have significantly more people to look after. Also, consider a merger with Lake Macquarie”. **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Spirit of greater co-operation between the factions will be of benefit to the wider community”, **telephone survey respondent**

## Timeliness

- “Could do a better job by making decisions more quickly and acting on it.”  
**Telephone survey respondent**
- “Less time taken for Development Application and Construction Certificate approvals.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**
- “Everything Council does takes too much time, eg park at Merewether.”  
**telephone survey respondent**
- “Give property owners in the CBD a deadline to repair, lease or sell their premises to uplift the city's appearance.” **Newcastle Voice respondent**