

# Road to Recovery

## Application for Special Rate Variation 2015/16 Community Engagement Strategy Summary Report



### BACKGROUND

The City of Newcastle is facing the challenge of balancing community expectations with future financial sustainability. A multi-year special rate variation (SRV) has been proposed to ensure medium to long term financial sustainability. The proposal for a SRV was included as part of the 2013-2017 Delivery Program and the 2014-2015 Operational Plan.

### ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The key objectives in engaging with the community were to gauge community support for the proposed SRV and provide opportunities for the community to provide feedback on the three rating options.

Key activities to **inform** the community included:

- Advertising in the Herald
- Road to Recovery information booklet, 72,000 copies distributed to households
- Road to Recovery article included in Council News Spring Edition, distributed to 54,000 ratepayers
- Media releases / coverage
- Lord Mayoral column
- Council website
- Community drop-in sessions
- Newcastle Voice newsletter

Key activities to **consult** with the community included:

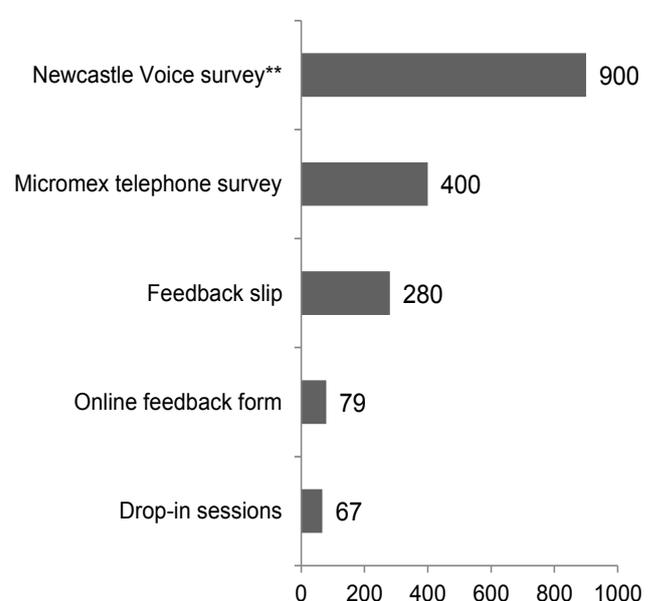
- *Newcastle Voice survey\*\**: open to Newcastle Voice members and the broad community
- *Phone survey*: conducted with 400 randomly selected households by Micromex Research
- *Feedback slip*: residents were invited to return complete a feedback slip included in the Road to Recovery information booklet
- *Online feedback form*: visitors to Council's website had the opportunity to indicate their order of preference for the three options
- *Drop-in community information sessions*: held in nine locations across Newcastle.

We communicated directly with **1,726** members of the Newcastle community during the Road to Recovery engagement activities.

**Overall, the community are supportive of a special rate variation.**

In the telephone and online surveys, Option 2—fund financial sustainability - received the most support. Feedback from other channels was more polarised, however two in every three community members gave their first preference to options involving a special rate variation (Options 2 and Option 3).

# residents participating in each activity



# Road to Recovery

## Micromex telephone survey



### Who conducted the survey?

The survey was conducted by an external organisation, Micromex Research Services.

### When was the survey conducted?

The survey commenced on Monday 13 October 2014 and concluded on Saturday 19 October 2014. Surveying was conducted on weekdays and weekends, during the day and evening.

### Who took part in the survey?

A random selection of households in the Newcastle LGA were contacted to take part in the telephone survey.

### How many took part in the survey?

In total, 400 community members residing in the Newcastle local government area were surveyed.

### What questions were asked?

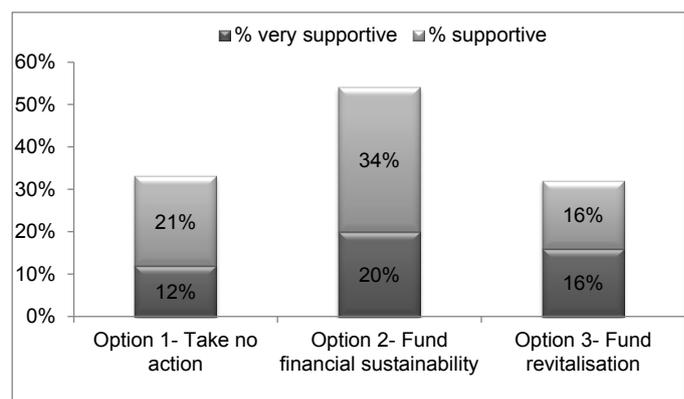
- Satisfaction with the quality of facilities and level of service currently provided by Council
- Importance of Council providing better facilities and services
- Awareness that Council is looking at options to ensure financial sustainability, include the possibility of a special rate variation
- Level of support for each of the three options
- Rank the three options in order of preference
- Open-ended questions asking reasons for most preferred option

### RESULTS

- 67% satisfied with the quality of facilities provided by Council
- 65% satisfied with the level of service provided by Council
- 93% indicated it was important for Council to provide better services and facilities
- 44% were aware that Council is investigating ways to ensure its ongoing financial sustainability

### Support for each option

- **Option 2, fund financial sustainability, received the greatest level of support**
- Using a 5-point scale, 54% of respondents indicated they were supportive or very supportive of Option 2
- An equivalent number of respondents were supportive or very supportive of Option 1 and Option 3, at 33% and 32% respectively



- When asked to rank the three options in their order of preference, 72% of respondents gave their first preference to one of the two options proposing a special rate variation:
  - Option 2– fund financial sustainability was the first preference among 52% of respondents
  - Option 3– fund revitalisation was the first preference among 20% of respondents.

Data has been weighted to be reflective of the Newcastle LGA in terms of age, location, and gender.

# Road to Recovery

## Newcastle Voice survey



### Who conducted the survey?

The survey was conducted by Council's Community Engagement Team .

### When was the survey conducted?

The survey commenced on Monday 13 October 2014 and concluded on Sunday 26 October 2014.

### Who took part in the survey?

All active online and offline Newcastle Voice members residing in the Newcastle LGA (n= 2253) were invited to take part in the survey. The survey was also available to broad community members via a link on Council's website

### How many took part in the survey?

In total, 900 community members took part in the survey. A total 689 Newcastle Voice members completed the survey (624 online and 65 offline), representing a response rate of 30.6%. Responses were also received from 211 members of the broad community.

### What questions were asked?

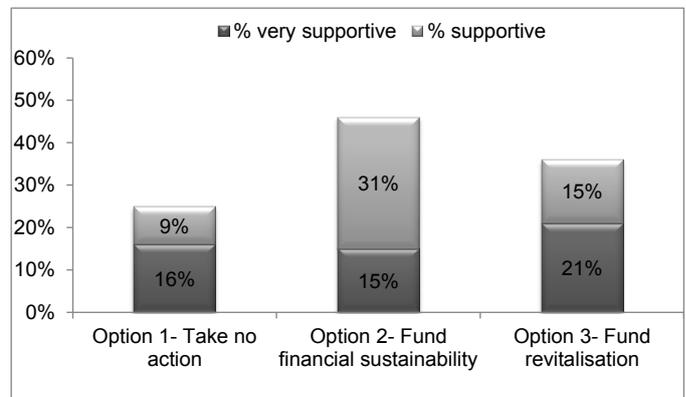
- Satisfaction with the quality of facilities and level of service currently provided by Council
- Importance of Council providing better facilities and services
- Awareness that Council is looking at options to ensure financial sustainability, including the possibility of a special rate variation
- Level of support for each of the three options
- Rank the three options in order of preference
- Open-ended questions asking reasons for most preferred option

### RESULTS

- 42% satisfied with the quality of facilities provided by Council
- 42% satisfied with the level of service provided by Council
- 82% indicated it was important for Council to provide better services and facilities
- 85% were aware that Council is investigating ways to ensure its ongoing financial sustainability

### Support for each option

- **Option 2, fund financial sustainability, received the greatest level of support**
- 46% of respondents indicated they were supportive or very supportive of Option 2
- Option 3 received greater support than option 1.



- When asked to rank the three options in their order of preference, 71% of respondents gave their first preference to one of the two options proposing a special rate variation:
  - Option 2– fund financial sustainability was the first preference among 38% of respondents
  - Option 3– fund revitalisation was the first preference among 34% of respondents.

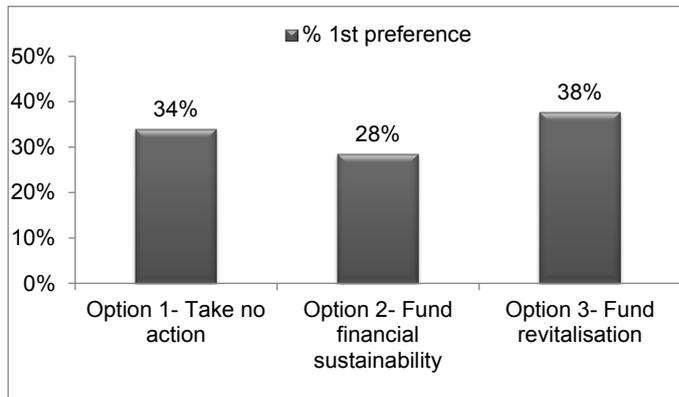
# Road to Recovery

## Other engagement activities



### INFORMATION BOOKLET- FEEDBACK SLIP

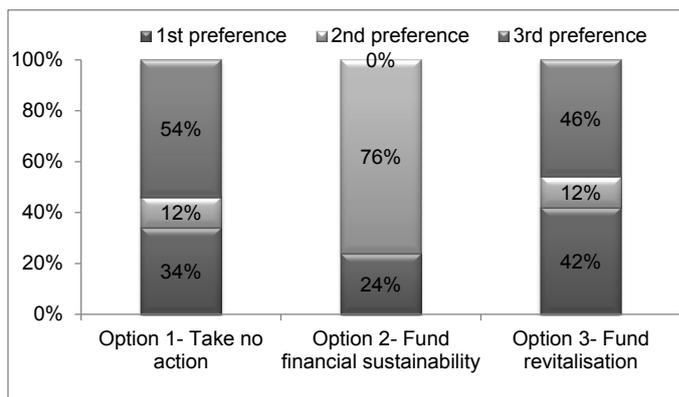
- This slip asked responders to rank the three options in order of preference
- 280 community members completed the slip and returned it to Council. Of these, 274 respondents attempted the rank order question\*.
- Of the 274 valid responses, 66% gave their first preference to one of the two options proposing a special rate variation (28% for Option 2 and 38% for Option 3).



\* As not all respondents completed the rank order question in full, only first preference percentages are shown

### ONLINE FEEDBACK FORM

- This form asked responders to rank the three options in order of preference
- 78 community members completed the online feedback form, which was available on Council's website
- Data was cleansed so that multiple responses from the same IP address received in a short time frame (<2minute) were excluded, resulting in 59 valid responses.
- Of the 59 valid responses, 66% gave their first preference to one of the two options proposing a special rate variation (24% for Option 2 and 42% for Option 3).



### COMMUNITY DROP IN SESSIONS

- Nine drop-in session held across the LGA, 67 community members in attendance
- Common topics raised:
  - ◊ Factors that led to Council's current financial position and actions taken over past two years
  - ◊ Affordability, particularly in regard to how increases may impact pensioners
  - ◊ Rate calculations
  - ◊ How funds are spent across the LGA, residents from wards 3 and 4 perceiving a disadvantage
  - ◊ 2012 SRV and how projects are progressing

Where	When	# attendees
New Lambton	9 Oct, 4.30-7.30pm	9
Adamstown	11 Oct, 9.30-12.00pm	8
Hamilton	14 Oct, 1.00-4.00pm	18
City	16 Oct, 5.00-8.00pm	1
Beresfield	18 Oct, 9.30-12.00pm	5
Mayfield	20 Oct, 10.00-1.00pm	11
Wallsend	22 Oct, 4.30-7.30pm	6
Lambton	23 Oct, 2.00-5.00pm	6
Stockton	25 Oct, 9.30-12.00pm	3

Unweighted data