

Consultation results: Borough of Queenscliffe **2020-21 budget**

As part of a renewed focus on community engagement, the Borough of Queenscliffe opened up our budget processes to the public over four weeks in October and November 2019. The results of this consultation, undertaken by 332 participants, clearly highlighted the priorities of the public and revealed important insights about our community's priorities for the next financial year.

This report outlines trends and themes from the feedback received, alongside individual examples of participant comments. The detail in this report will be reviewed by Councillors and officers throughout the organisation, both to shape the direction of the 2020-21 Borough of Queenscliffe Budget and to gain a better understanding of community priorities.

This initiative is an innovative new approach to community engagement, and is a step towards the Borough of Queenscliffe's goal of being a leader in this space. Its success, however, is a result of the participation of our community, and Council thanks everyone who took part for giving their thoughts and time to this engagement. Your voice is helping us create a better Borough.

Results summary

Respondents on average wanted Council to spend more on **assets, facilities and public spaces**, as well as **environment and waste**. Notable project suggestions included footpath improvements, tree planting, and recycling.

Planning was the only category in which participants suggested Council slightly reduce expenditure. Common concerns were around processes and consultancy fees.

Overall, respondents were happy with Council's spend and direction in **arts and libraries**, and **tourism and business support**.

Respondents shared Council's commitment to a balanced budget. In identifying revenue sources, most responses wanted Council to seek government grants where additional revenues were required. A significant majority also wanted Council to reinvest savings in other projects instead of reducing the size of rate increases.

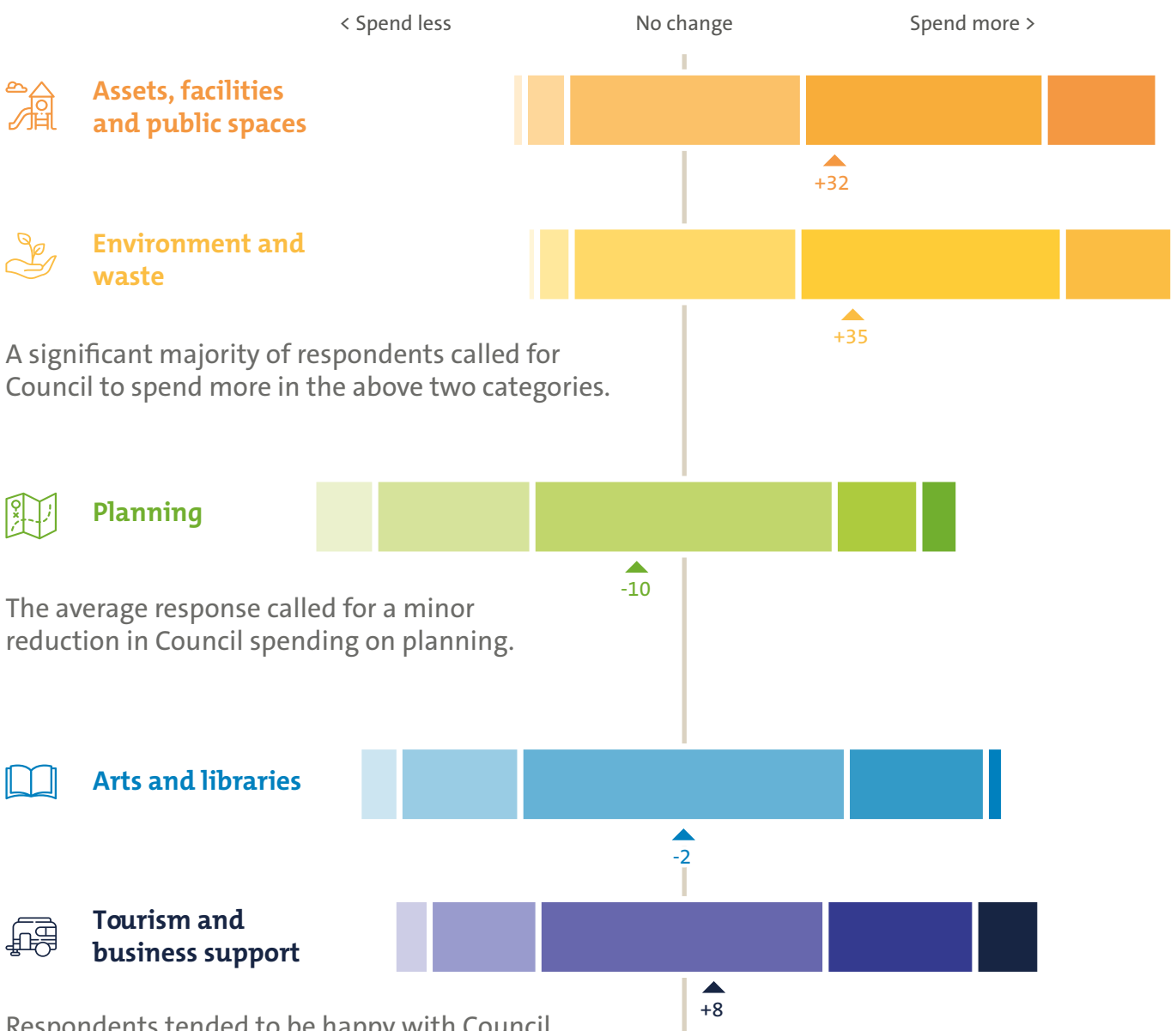
Further detailed results data and sample comments can be found throughout this document.



Funding priorities

Participants were asked whether Council should spend more or less on each budget category, including whether Council should spend “a little” or “a lot” more or less. All of these scores were then averaged to understand which categories respondents felt Council should spend more or less on, and how strongly they felt this way.

The below chart shows the distribution of responses by category. Each category shows respondent answers from “spend a lot less” on the left, to “spend a lot more” on the right, with the average value marked by an arrow underneath the bar.



A significant majority of respondents called for Council to spend more in the above two categories.

The average response called for a minor reduction in Council spending on planning.

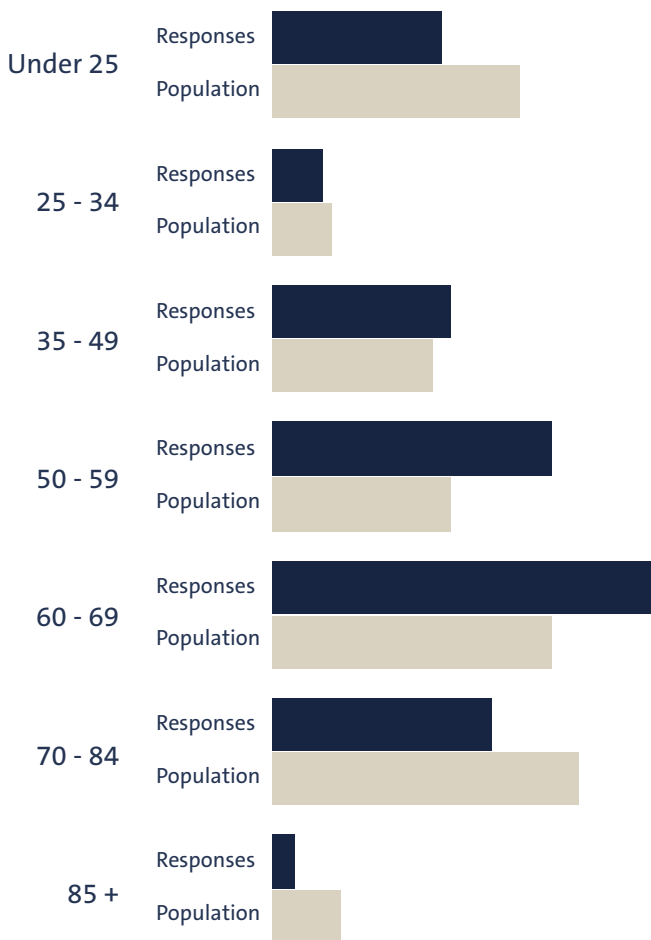
Respondents tended to be happy with Council spending in the above categories, calling for no major changes in either direction.

Demographic results

Responses to the survey were also tracked across two demographic metrics – the age of respondents, and whether respondents resided in the Borough full-time, part-time, or as a visitor.

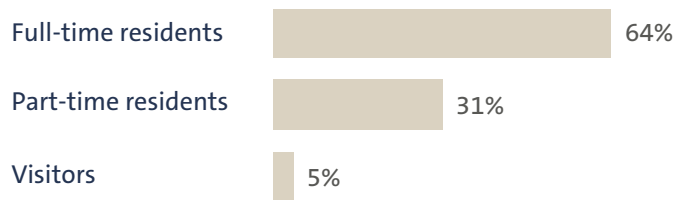
Responses by age vs. Borough population

Respondents from the 35-69 age group were overrepresented in providing feedback, while responses from residents under 35 and over 70 were underrepresented. Council officers were able to preemptively reduce the size of this imbalance by facilitating participation by school students.



Responses by residency

Full-time residents represented a majority of responses – higher than the proportion of ratepayers.



Response variation by age

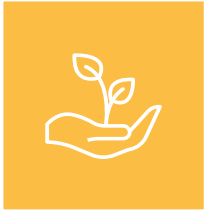
Throughout most of the survey, response averages did not vary significantly by age. The few variations by age included:

- Respondents under the age of 50 tended to prioritise environmental projects much more than respondents older than 50.
- Within the assets category, respondents under the age of 50 tended to prioritise parks and outdoor activities at almost double the rate of older respondents.

Response variation by residency

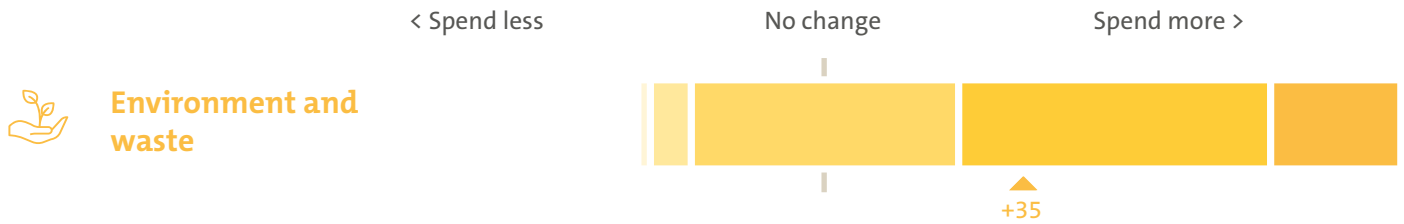
When sorted into responses from full-time residents compared to part-time residents and visitors, a few trends also emerge:

- Full-time residents prioritised the assets category at a higher level than the response pool overall.
- Full-time residents tended to call for more radical changes to the budget, suggesting greater spending increases and greater cuts across all categories except tourism.

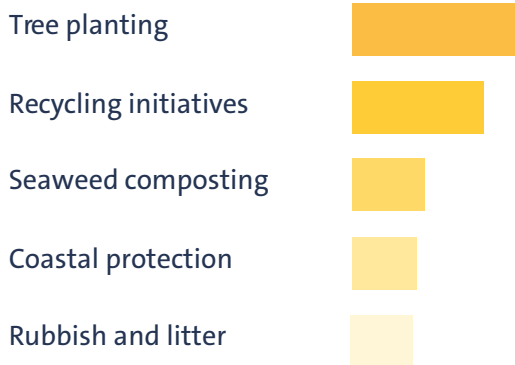


Environment and waste

Of all the categories, environment and waste had the highest number of respondents calling for spending increases, with an average score of +35 on the previous scale. This tells us that residents put a high priority on environmental and waste projects, with almost one in five respondents calling for Council to “spend a lot more” in this budget area.



Respondents tended to point to recycling, tree planting and keeping open spaces clean and tidy as priorities for this category. The most popular projects suggested were:



What we heard from students:

Students clearly value our local beaches and frequently suggested an increased number of waste bins and ashtrays along the foreshore. This feedback appears to be motivated by school clean-up activities along various local beaches where students have identified rubbish as a consistent issue.

38% of students wanted more trees planted, and one suggestion supported by almost one in five students was the introduction of fishing line disposal bins at the pier, preventing environmental damage and/or sea and bird life getting tangled in the line.

Some of the things we heard from you:

“Set up a recycling centre where you can bring E-Waste (including batteries), Cardboard and other materials.”

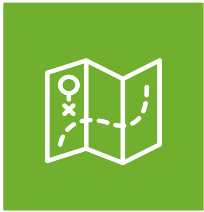
“I would like residents to get some info about how well we recycle waste as a way to improving practice. I also commend the Borough for the e-waste and hard rubbish recycling programs.”

“I would like to see even more solar panels installed, renewable energies investigated.”

“I really like the seaweed composting and would love to know how we could get our hands on some of it for our garden? I have also wondered if a community mulching program could be something to consider?”

“Removal of weed species from Crown land.”

“Tackling the Climate Emergency locally. Reducing the Borough’s carbon footprint - public transport, bike paths, solar panel program, window film to retain heat, research to take the Borough off the grid.”



Planning

Planning was the only category in which the average participants suggested Council slightly reduce expenditure. Responses in this category averaged -10. Respondents who suggested a funding decrease noted that they made this decision in order to save money for spending elsewhere, or because they believed existing planning processes were ineffective.



The planning category attracted far fewer project suggestions than other categories, however respondents provided broader feedback on planning processes overall, including:

- Heritage protection 
- Built form consistency 
- Better planning processes 
- Open space planning 

What we heard from students:

Students concentrated on sustainability in building design, with some suggesting mandating solar panels on new buildings in the Borough. Some students were concerned about overdevelopment and other suggested demolishing “old, useless buildings” or selling off empty buildings to new tenants.

One answer posed ideas to activate the large vacant space next to the old Tavern, highlighting the potential for new food outlets. Another unique suggestion was a lookout plan, identifying the best places in Queenscliff and Point Lonsdale to get a view.

Some of the things we heard from you:

“The town will look very different once sea levels rise! We need to be planning for the future, we shouldn’t be fixed and rigid, we should be dynamic, flexible and innovative.”

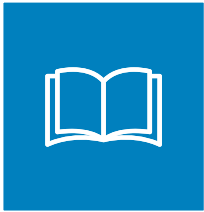
“Planning for sustainable growth - not needing more spending in this area but better/more effective planning.”

“I would like to see a complete audit of physical accessibility in the Borough.”

“The council seems to be driven by outspoken residents who have nothing positive to say only negative input and these few vocal persons disrupt due process and think they speak for the majority, they criticize and oppose anything constructive and cost other ratepayers more by delaying processes and planning with legal disputes for little gain.”

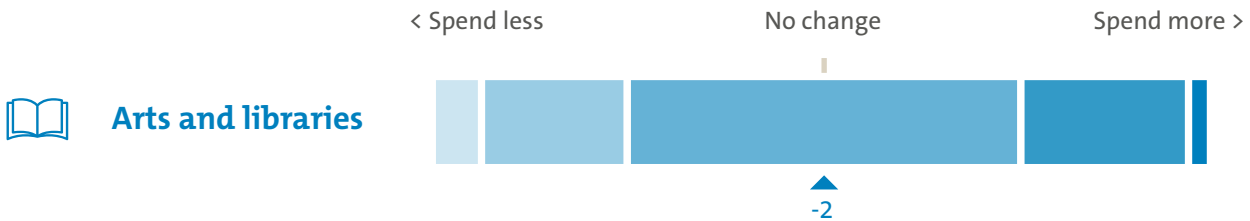
“Heritage is important but needs to be within a modern context. Please stop wasting money on so many consultant’s reports.”

“Queenscliff has a fantastic heritage/history and should not be lost as Queenscliff becomes bigger in a Commercial sense. Let’s keep its village feel.”

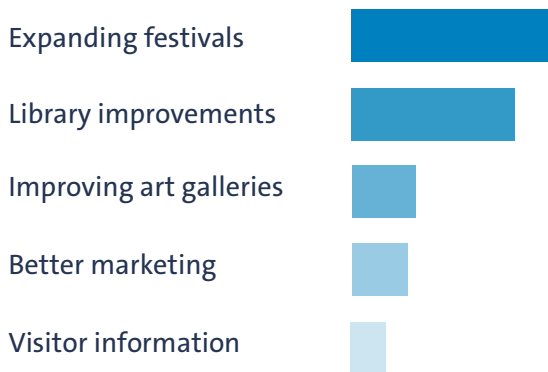


Arts and libraries

Respondents tended to feel that Council’s funding for arts and libraries was where it needed to be, with the average score for spending changes landing very close to 0. Respondents also tended to rate Council’s performance highly in comments for this category, with comments frequently suggesting building on existing work.



Respondents were most interested in seeing funding go to expanding library offerings and building on Council’s festival program. The five most popular suggestions were:



What we heard from students:

Every student in the class hasn’t known a Queenscliff without the Queenscliff Music Festival, so it came as no surprise that 48% suggested improvements and feedback specifically related to it. A wider variety and increased number of rides at QMF was a main concern, with one student suggesting that charging a fee for use would attract a greater quality of rides.

Students enjoy the local library, but were happy to propose upgrades including more books, longer opening times, better computers, iPads, and internal toilets.

Some of the things we heard from you:

“Promoting, supporting and building Low Lowlight Winter Arts Festival.”

“Perhaps a second library in Point Lonsdale.”

“Something for kids. So many families have moved to the area and there is nothing for under 5’s. A proper kids space in the library would be great.”

“It is vital that the Literary Festival is encouraged and supported as this brings people of interest and outsiders to the community alongside stimulating community thought and spirit.”

“Local galleries... are a major drawcard and should be supported.”

“Mobile libraries including distributing talking books for the elderly hearing and sight impaired residents.”

“Maintain and extend the facilities of the Visitor Information Centre.”

“Keep doing what Council has done in the past.”



Tourism and businesses

Respondents also felt that Council’s tourism and business support funding was close to where it needed to be, with a tendency to favour internal rebalancing of priorities within the category over major changes to spending for this area as a whole.



Improvements to Council’s caravan parks were a very popular suggestion, followed by a broad range of suggestions to improve the Borough’s visitor economy. This included:



What we heard from students:

Caravan parks were also the most favoured spending priority for students, with 32% suggesting improvements. Suggestions included a jumping pillow (25%) and a pool (14%). Broader suggestions to make the Borough more attractive to visitors included a comic book store, a cinema, and the return of a fish and chip shop to Point Lonsdale.

Through almost all suggestions, students identified that a greater range of activities for young people would help encourage more families to visit and spend money in the Borough instead of other destinations.

Some of the things we heard from you:

“Maintenance of traditional caravan park facilities so that less well off families can still enjoy the Aussie tradition of a summer at the beach.”

“The Runway program that runs in Geelong is a great program for business startups. We need to see more forward business initiatives like this to support wider business activity and developments across the community.”

“Suggest looking to CoGG and the UNESCO City of Design - maybe we could tie into that?”

“I think I would like you to give some money... to each of the schools in the borough for the kids to come up with a concept plan for a kids celebration of some sort. I know we have the lighting of the Christmas tree but we also have a strong focus on older people and we tend to forget the younger generation.”

“Introduce incentives for ferry passengers to stop and shop in Queenscliff – maybe a voucher funded by a ferry fee increase that can be redeemed... at businesses in the town?”

“Make the queenscliff Caravan park more attractive – more greenery.”

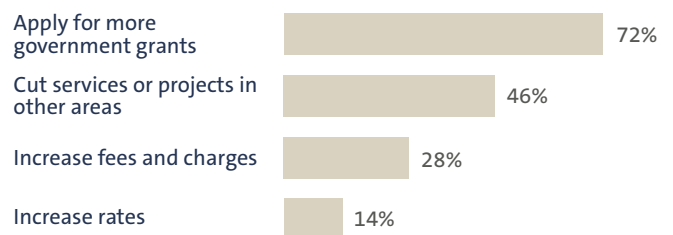
Balancing the budget

This consultation activity was programmed to identify when participants suggested increases or decreases in spending. Participants who suggested increased spending were asked how Council should raise additional revenue to pay for increases, and participants who suggested spending cuts were asked how Council should reinvest the savings.

Paying for more spending

Respondents tended to want Council to find ways to pay for spending increases without increasing revenue measures. Most popular were applying for more government grants (71%) or rebalancing the budget by making compensatory cuts in other areas (48%).

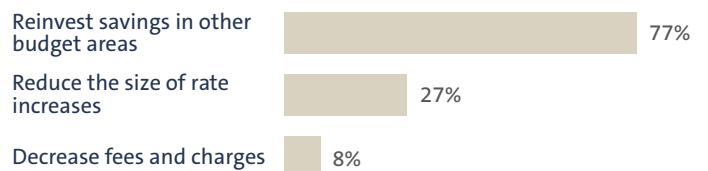
This tells us that while respondents want Council to increase spending in some areas, this should only occur if Council can fund these increases without raising additional revenues.



Reinvesting savings from cuts

When respondents suggested reducing expenditure on categories, projects or services, preference was overwhelmingly given to reinvesting those savings in other areas of Council's budget (77%).

This tells us that respondents value particular projects and services highly, and want Council to use budget savings to invest further in these priority areas.



Key lessons

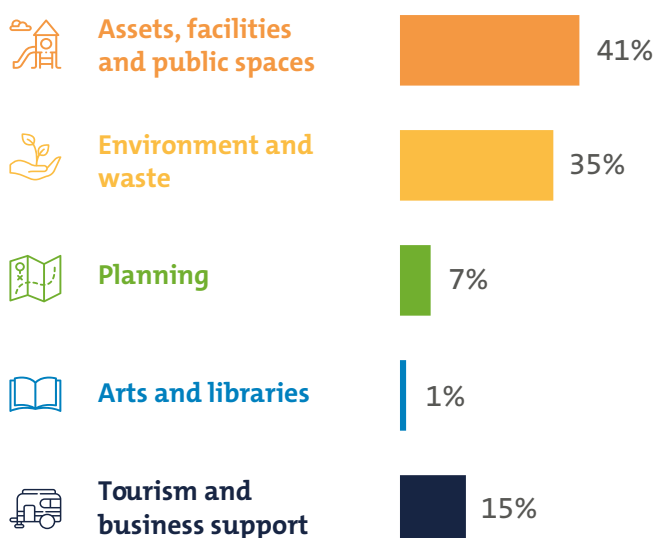
Taken together, respondents clearly value Council's balanced budget, and consistently looked for ways to pay for spending increases by finding savings in other areas of Council's budget.

Where additional funds are required, respondents wanted Council to seek government grants before attempting to raise revenue directly through fees, charges and rates.

Final questions

At the end of the consultation, respondents were asked to nominate which single category should be Council's highest priority for next year's budget.

Assets, facilities and public spaces topped the list, followed by environment and waste. This reinforces the results of the budget weighting question, in which residents also identified these two categories as spending priority areas.



Respondents were also provided with the opportunity to provide further comments on any aspect of the survey or budget process overall. While no significant trends emerged in this section, comments made here have also been recorded and filed for further consideration.

Next steps

Council will use the information in this report to guide key decisions in preparing the 2020-21 Borough of Queenscliffe Budget. Initial work has already started, and a draft budget is expected to be released in April 2020.

Alongside the draft budget, Council will explain how feedback received in this consultation has been included in the budget. Residents and ratepayers will also have an opportunity to respond to the draft budget, as has happened as part of Council's previous budget consultation opportunities.

Participants who provided an email address will be notified directly as the project progresses, and will also be provided with the results in this document.

Council thanks everyone who took the time to take part in this budget consultation.

Methodology and footnotes

Consultation goal

The Borough of Queenscliffe has been exploring new and more effective ways to involve the community in decision-making processes. In particular, Council has sought opportunities for early-stage consultation with the community, in which projects and ideas are still being generated.

Budget consultation was identified and selected as an opportunity for Council to receive useful feedback about its priorities and goals, and implement that feedback into a broader strategic direction. The significant volume and quality of responses have met the high expectations of the Communications team, and leave Council well-placed to produce a more responsive, community-focused budget.

Tool selection

Council officers identified that an online tool would allow the survey to dynamically respond to user input. In other words, the survey would track how respondents were making decisions and ask follow-up questions as they completed the task. This enabled Council to gain a more detailed insight into community priorities. For this reason, an online survey was developed alongside a drop-in service at Council offices for those without internet access at home.

Participants responded well to this methodology, with responses matching expected levels compared to other recent consultations.

Advertising

Council advertised this consultation opportunity more widely than any other recent consultation, including:

- Direct mail with rates notices and emails to all ratepayers
- Letterbox drops to residential letterboxes throughout the Borough
- Emailing recent consultation participants inviting them to take part, including a follow-up email
- Advertising in local newspapers and mayor's columns
- Issuing a media release that generated significant coverage in local media.

This advertising helped ensure Council gained a broad and representative range of views upon which to base strategic budgeting decisions.

Demographic balance

Communications officers have noted that recent consultation has not had a proportional response from younger demographics. Officers worked to proactively correct this imbalance for this consultation, and invited local primary schools to participate. Council officers visited grade 5/6 students at St Aloysius Primary School to gather responses which were included in the final results.

This activity helped ensure that this consultation was more demographically representative of our community than other recent activities. Council thanks St Aloysius staff and students for their participation and assistance.

Response quality control

Council received 332 responses to its budget consultation. The vast majority of these responses were well-considered and thoughtful, and examined in detail. Only a small number of responses had to be removed from the final reporting pool to avoid affecting data quality. Responses removed included those that:

- Did not answer a majority of questions
- Were duplicate responses
- Gave identical answers to a large number of questions
- Contained abuse or profanity.

Participants were notified at the beginning of the consultation activity that responses must be complete to be included in the final results.

Responses removed from the reporting pool have been retained by Council for record-keeping purposes.

Internal reporting

Because of the quality of data received by Council during this consultation, Communications Officers have prepared and reported on responses to program leaders throughout Council. This ensures that ideas submitted by participants reach a broad range of staff and give officers a better understanding of community priorities.

