



# Singleton Council SRV

## Community and Business surveys

17 November 2015

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# Document information

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Background, objectives & approach

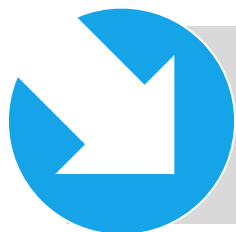
# Background & objectives

- ■ In the context of the NSW Government's latest review, Singleton Council has been deemed 'Fit for the Future'. However, Singleton Council has also calculated that to be able to continue to meet the 7 indicators set out in the review, to renew its assets, and to maintain services at their current level, it would need a rate increase for the next 4 years of 9.75% per annum. This would require a Special Rate Variation (SRV) and approval from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).
- ■ There are effectively two possible scenarios. One is a successful submission to IPART with approval for the SRV of 9.75% per annum for the next 4 years to be able to renew assets and maintain service levels. The alternative is a rate peg only increase of around 2.5% per annum for the next 4 years, which would not provide sufficient funds for asset renewal and would have adverse impacts on services. Council's preference therefore would be for the SRV.
- ■ Singleton Council wanted to undertake a program of research, communications and community engagement to assess the potential impact of these two possible courses of action; and assess community views. Along with its own internal analysis, and an externally commissioned analysis of capacity to pay (undertaken by the Western Research Institute in Bathurst), Instinct and Reason was commissioned to undertake community research.
- ■ This research was designed to obtain reliable, robust indicators of the views of residential ratepayers and business ratepayers; to obtain these views in light of a reasonable degree of, and balanced provision of, relevant information; to gain insight into, and understanding of, the community's perspective; to assist Singleton Council in undertaking an appropriate process of research and community engagement; and to guide the decision-making process.

# Methodology

research among residential and business ratepayers

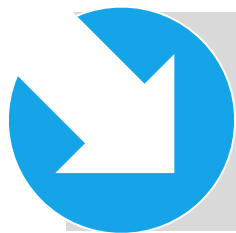
**A structured telephone survey among cross-sectional samples of residential and business ratepayers, follow-up qualitative research (one-to-one depth interviews and an online forum), and an open opportunity to comment via an online survey.**



A survey questionnaire was designed around the core issue of the two scenarios for rate increases and asset renewal/service levels, with other necessary questions for context and analysis. The options were carefully summarised and suitable questions devised. The survey was tested and piloted, and timed at around 12-13 minutes as a telephone interview.



A telephone survey was carried out among residential ratepayers (n=465) and business ratepayers (n=101) between 1-11 November 2015. Households were randomly selected and the ratepayer/head of household interviewed. Businesses were randomly called and interviews undertaken with the owner-proprietor (in most cases) or an appropriate director/senior manager. In each case, a good cross-section of ratepayers were surveyed.



In addition to the tightly controlled cross-sectional survey carried out by telephone, an online version of the survey has been set up to provide an opportunity for other ratepayers to comment, following comprehensive information being provided by Singleton Council. Instinct and Reason is also undertaking some follow up qualitative research.



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## Executive summary

# Executive summary

## Option A (rate peg only) or Option B (SRV for 9.75% pa)?

- ■ In the telephone survey among cross-sectional samples of 465 residential ratepayers and 101 business ratepayers, carried out 1-11 November 2015, the two scenarios were described as Option A and Option B.
- ■ The respective rate rises were clarified, with Option A being the rate peg only increase of around 2.5% pa and Option B being a 9.75% pa increase for the next 4 years, including the rate peg. The total increases over the 4 year period were clarified. The implications were also outlined, with Option B enabling asset renewal and maintenance of current service levels, and Option A having potentially adverse impacts on service levels.
- ■ Asked which option they would prefer Singleton Council to choose, a majority of both residential ratepayers and business ratepayers favoured Option A but with a substantial proportion favouring the more costly Option B.
- ■ Residential ratepayers split 65% Option A and 35% Option B. Business ratepayers split 60% Option A and 40% Option B.



# Executive summary

## Option A (rate peg only) or Option B (SRV for 9.75% pa) – key sub-group variations

- ■ There is a clear relationship between the preferences expressed and the amount that ratepayers (say they) currently pay in general rates.
- ■ Among business ratepayers who currently pay less than \$1,500, a majority favour Option B (43% A, 57% B). Among those who pay \$2,000 or more, fewer than one in three favour Option B (70% A, 30% B).
- ■ Among residential ratepayers who pay less than \$1,000, there is an even split in preferences between Option A (48%) and Option B (52%). Among those who currently pay \$2,000 or more, there is a clear preference for Option A (75% A, 25% B).
- ■ Income and other socio-economic factors are not key drivers of preferences, but the survey suggests two other factors are key – affordability and perceptions of value from what ratepayers currently pay.
- ■ Among those who perceive good value, 51% favour Option B; among those who perceive poor value, 83% favour Option A.
- ■ 72% of those who can afford to pay more favour Option A; 71% of those who can't afford to pay more favour Option B.

# Executive summary

## Option A (rate peg only) or Option B (SRV for 9.75% pa) – likely reactions

- ■ Asked how they would react if Singleton Council chose Option A, there are mixed results from both business ratepayers (33% would be happy with that outcome, 33% unhappy, and 31% not bothered either way) and residential ratepayers (36% happy, 35% unhappy, 26% neutral).
- ■ Asked how they would react if Singleton Council chose Option B, the results are heavily weighted to the negative, with greater strength of feeling too. 62% of business ratepayers say they would be unhappy, including 26% very unhappy. 65% of residential ratepayers say they would be unhappy, including 42% very unhappy.
- ■ Again, a key differentiator is how much they currently pay – 80% of residential ratepayers paying \$2,000+ would be unhappy with Option B compared with 54% of those paying under \$1,000. Note that this means even among those paying under \$1,000, a majority would be unhappy with Option B. Also note that a majority of those paying \$2,000+ would be very unhappy with Option B (58%).

# Executive summary

## Option A (rate peg only) or Option B (SRV for 9.75% pa) – likely reactions, drivers and context

- The survey results once again highlight the relationship between views on the two Options and affordability and perceptions of value from what ratepayers currently pay.
- Half of those who can afford to pay and want more investment would be unhappy if Singleton Council chose Option A, although bear in mind that this group is a minority (just 13% of all ratepayers). Among those who perceive poor value, 83% would be unhappy with Option B, 66% very unhappy; and this is a more prevalent sub-group (28% of all ratepayers).
- Most ratepayers, both residential and business, do not consider themselves to use or benefit from Council services and facilities to any great extent. Among residential ratepayers paying less than \$1,000 in general rates, 46% think they get good value and 16% poor value. Among those paying \$2,000 or more, it is the reverse – 23% good value, 41% poor value.
- Despite the hard evidence of Singleton having relatively low rates, the perception among ratepayers is that rates are high, and almost one in three challenge any proposition that rates or rate increases have been historically low. Many more say they simply don't know.

# Executive summary

## Option A (rate peg only) or Option B (SRV for 9.75% pa) – likely reactions, drivers and context (cont'd)

- ■ Most ratepayers think that Singleton Council needs to provide more services and facilities but there is a reluctance to pay more, so the notion of paying significantly more simply to maintain current service levels is difficult to comprehend.
- ■ Almost two in three ratepayers think that Singleton Council gets an appropriate contribution from big business, and around half think it does all it can to get Federal or State government funding, although more than one in three don't know how it works with other councils, and don't know about scope to reduce service levels.
- ■ Most significantly, two in five residential ratepayers (43%) and business ratepayers (39%) describe Singleton Council as '*wasteful and inefficient*' (with just 38% and 35% respectively rejecting such a proposition). It is hard in such a context to persuade ratepayers to pay more.
- ■ Seven in ten ratepayers position themselves in the category '*I'm reluctant to pay more in rates, but I don't want reduced service levels*', with 22% of residential ratepayers taking the view '*I'm not prepared to pay more in rates, even if it means reduced service levels*'. In addition, 87% of ratepayers don't think they can afford to pay more, with only 13% answering '*want more investment...and can afford to pay more in rates to get it*'.

# Executive summary

## **'Fit for the Future' context and Singleton as a stand alone council**

- ■ It was explained to ratepayers that the survey was being carried out in the context of the 'Fit for the Future' review and financial indicators, with Singleton Council calculating what it thinks it needs as a Special Rate Variation (SRV) to be able to continue to renew its assets and provide essential services.
- ■ Consistent with the other results expressed in the survey, when ratepayers were asked about the principle of Singleton remaining a stand alone council, there is evidence of financial pragmatism.
- ■ Ratepayers are evenly split between '*I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council*' (46% of residential ratepayers, 40% of business ratepayers) and '*I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council, but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates*' (42% and 44% respectively).
- ■ The key drivers of views on this question are perceptions of current rate levels and perceptions of value for what they currently pay. Among those residential ratepayers who think that the rates are very high, 61% take the view '*I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger if it meant lower increases in rates*'. Among those perceiving good value, 63% really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council; among those perceiving poor value, it is half that level at 32%.

# Executive summary

## How much more prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level

- ■ Many residential ratepayers (29%) and business ratepayers (37%) are not prepared to pay any more '*to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level*'.
- ■ The proportions of business ratepayers prepared to pay more are 28% for \$10 per week more, 6% for \$15 per week more, 19% for \$20 per week more, 2% for \$30 per week more, and 1% for \$40 per week more. This translates into a mean amount they are prepared to pay in additional rates of \$7.20 per week.
- ■ The proportions of residential ratepayers prepared to pay more are 23% for \$3 per week more, 29% for \$5 per week more, 5% for \$8 per week more and 6% for \$10 per week more. This translates into a mean amount prepared to pay in additional rates of \$3.42 per week.
- ■ In contrast to the variation in Option A or B preferences by current amount paid, the figures for \$ amount prepared to pay does not vary significantly by current amount paid in rates. Of course, this will be partly because it is a \$ amount rather than a % increase being asked about.
- ■ As we would expect, affordability is an issue but perceptions of benefit and value from current facilities and services are also key drivers. Also note that even among those with the highest incomes, one in four (26%) are not prepared to pay any more.



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## Sample profiles

# Sample profile – Residents

## gender, age, household composition

Gender	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Man	210	45
Woman	255	55

Household situation	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Single under 30 years	1	*
Single 30 years and over	54	12
Share accommodation	3	1
Couple without children	133	29
Family with most children under 16 years	100	22
Family with most children 16 years and over	158	34
Other	16	3

Age	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Under 45	96	21
45-54	139	30
55-64	121	26
65+	109	23

Children living at home	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Yes, aged under 6	33	7
Yes, aged 6-10	32	7
Yes, aged 11-15	37	8
Yes, aged 16-18	67	14
No	296	64



# Sample profile - Residents

## employment/main activity and income

Employment/main activity	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Employed full-time	137	29
Employed part-time/flexible hours	79	17
Self-employed	37	8
Unemployed and seeking work	11	2
Unemployed and not seeking work	6	1
Unable to work due to ill-health or disability, or being a carer for someone with ill health or a disability	10	2
Retired (self-funded or eligible pensioner)	150	32
Looking after the home full-time	30	6
Student on full-time course	0	0
Other	5	1

Annual household income before tax	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Less than \$25,000	55	12
Between \$25,000 and \$49,000	68	15
Between \$50,000 and \$74,000	58	12
Between \$75,000 and \$99,000	52	11
Between \$100,000 and \$149,000	83	18
Between \$150,000 and \$199,000	43	9
\$200,000 or more	8	2
Prefer not to say	98	21

# Sample profile - Residents

home location, housing tenure, and internet access

Home location	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Singleton town	317	68
Out-of-town	148	32

Housing tenure	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
I live in a house that I own outright	256	55
I live in a house I'm buying with a mortgage	201	43
I live in a unit that I own outright	4	1
I live in a unit I'm buying with a mortgage	3	1
Other	1	*

Internet access	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>
Yes, own computer or mobile device	405	87
No, but can get access, eg library, work	5	1
No, don't have internet access	55	12

# Sample profile – Business ratepayers

## main activity, size, location, and respondent role

Main activity/sector	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>
Agriculture/food processing	16	16
Construction	7	7
Education/training	6	6
Financial services	1	1
Health care/social care	9	9
Hospitality/tourism	4	4
IT/telecoms	1	1
Leisure/recreation/arts	3	3
Manufacturing	5	5
Mining	8	8
Professional services	12	12
Property/real estate	2	2
Retail	19	19
Transport/distribution	2	2
Other	6	6

Respondent role	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>
Owner-proprietor	69	68
Director	8	8
Other	24	24

No. of people employed locally	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>
Up to 5	60	59
6-10	21	21
11-20	10	10
21-50	5	5
51-100	2	2
More than 100	3	3

Business location	n=	%
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>
Singleton town	71	70
Out-of-town	30	30



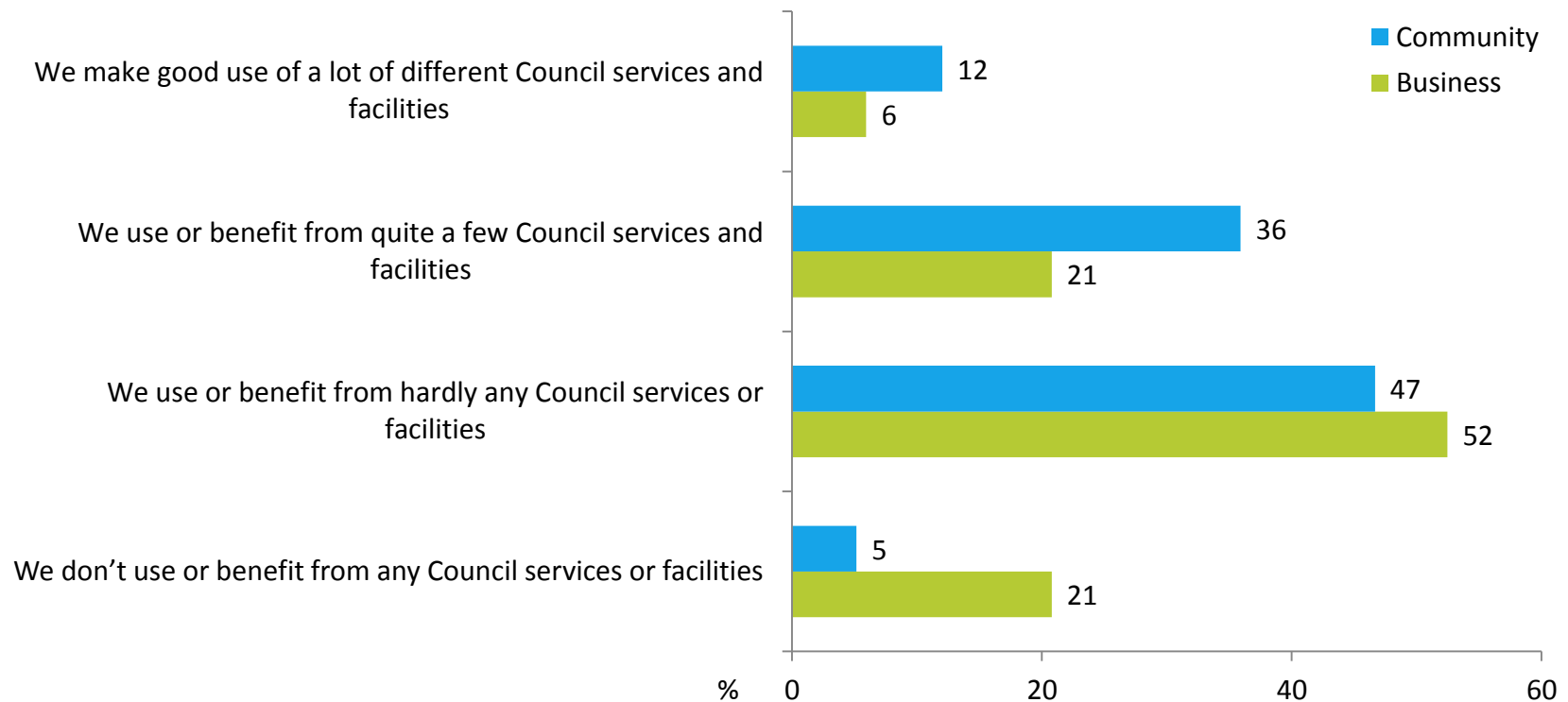
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## Singleton Council services and communications

# Use of Council services and facilities

## Community and Business

When studying the results to later questions, including being prepared to pay more or support a higher increase in rates, it is important to understand the context in which these views are being expressed. For example, most ratepayers perceive limited benefit from Council services and facilities:



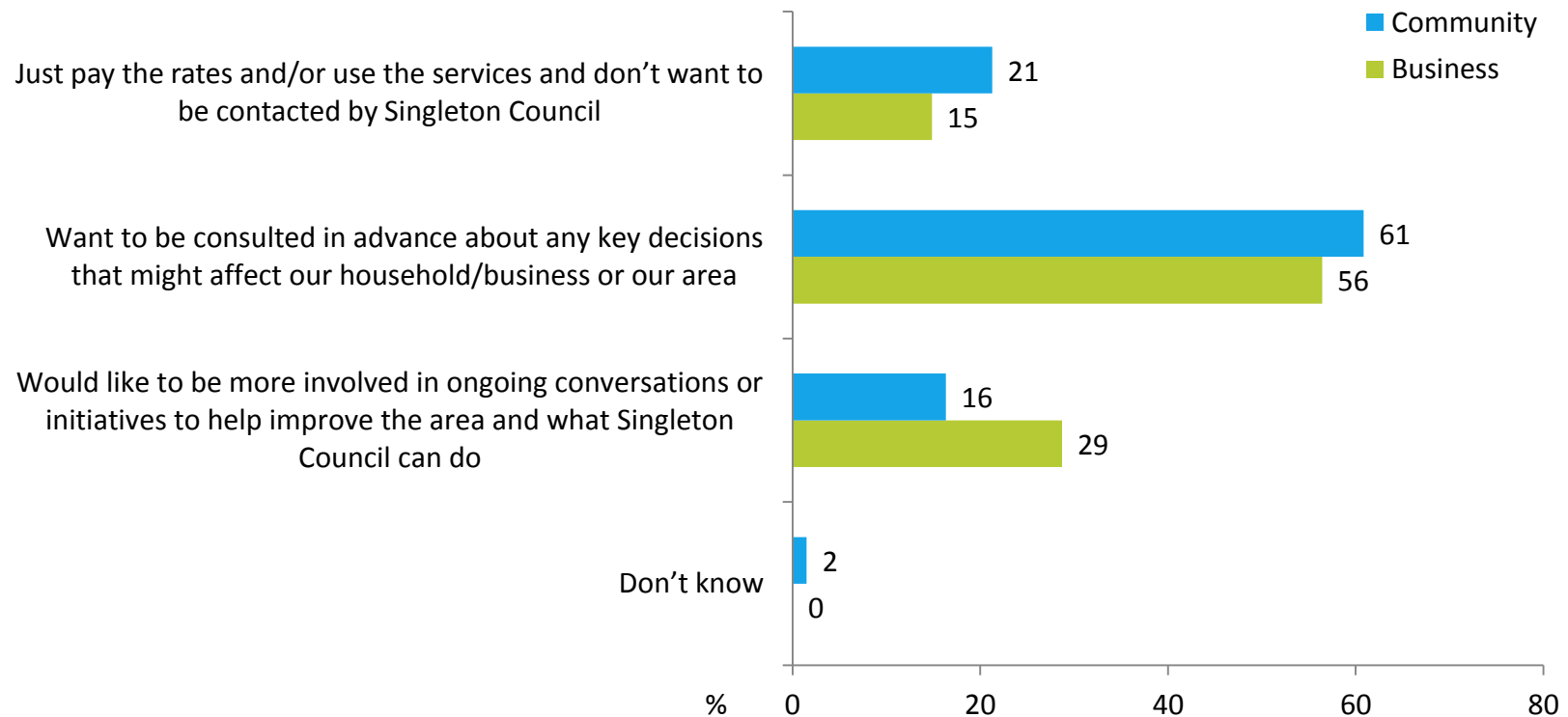
**QA1.** Which of these statements best describes your [household/business]?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Preferred relationship with Singleton Council

## Community and Business

A majority of both residential ratepayers (61%) and business ratepayers (56%) want to be consulted about key decisions that might affect their household/business or their area. A further three in ten business ratepayers (29%) want a more ongoing dialogue. So clearly there is a demand for consultation and engagement.



**QA2.** Which best describes your own situation in terms of your preferred relationship with Singleton Council?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.



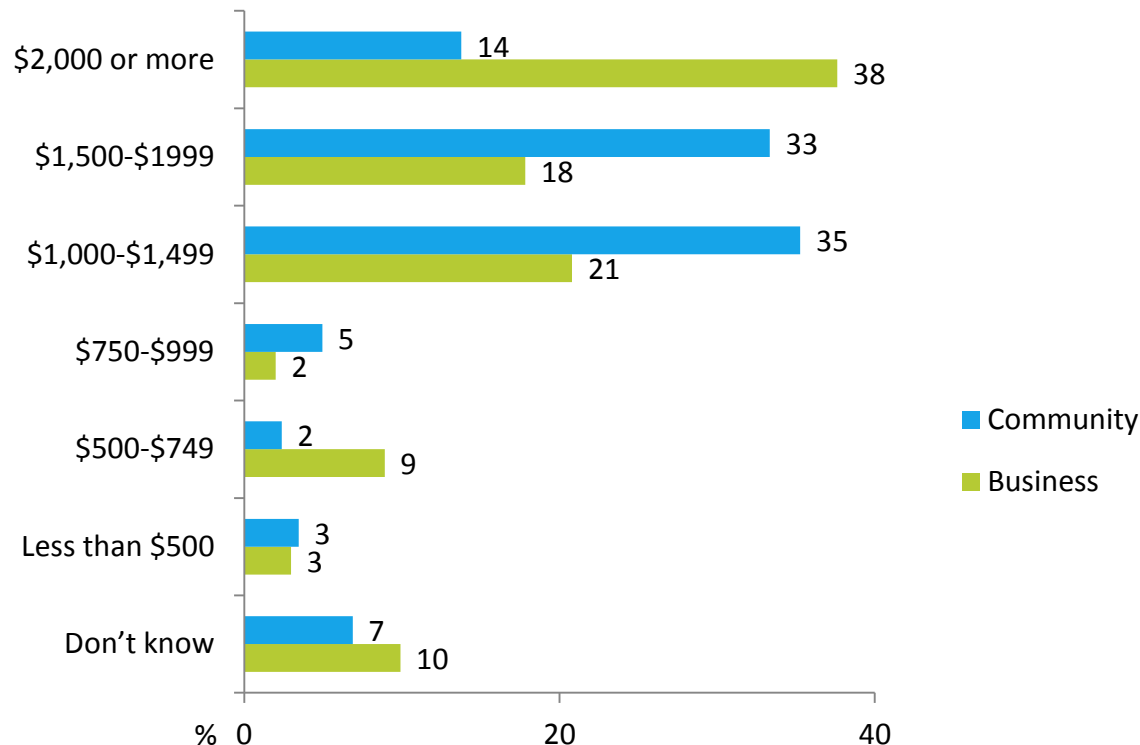
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Levels of rates and services

# Current rates paid to Singleton Council

## Community and Business

Two in three residential ratepayers surveyed (68%) say they currently pay between \$1,000 and \$2,000 in general rates. A majority of the business ratepayers surveyed (56%) say they currently pay more than \$1,500. The results to later questions have been analysed by what ratepayers (say they) currently pay.



**QB2.** How much does your [household/business] currently pay in general rates each year to Singleton Council? By 'general rates', we mean excluding water and sewerage charges.

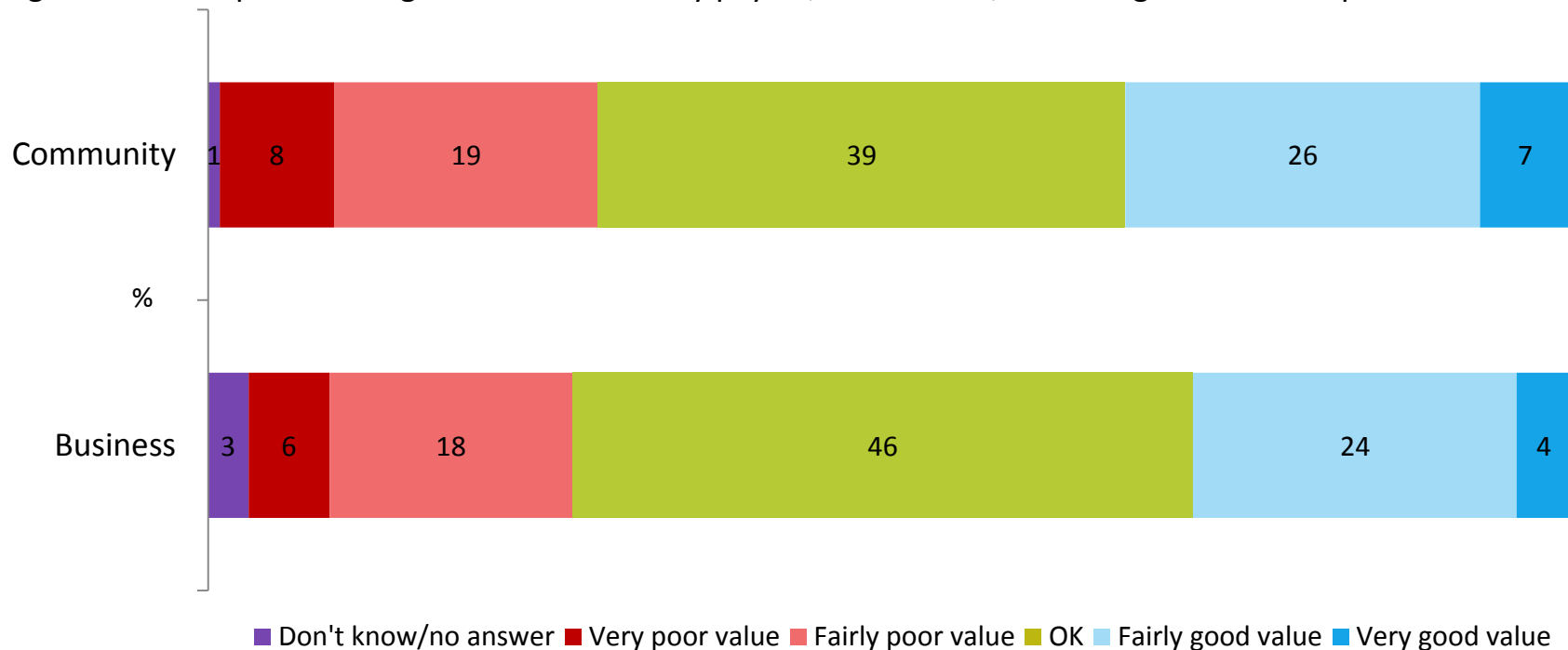
**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.



# Value rating of Council services and facilities

## Community and Business

When studying views on future rate increases, it is important to check on perceptions of value. As the chart below shows, results are mixed. Among residential ratepayers, 33% perceive good value, 27% poor value, and 39% answer 'ok'. Among business ratepayers, it is 28% good, 24% poor, and 46% ok. Ratepayers living out-of-town are especially likely to answer 'poor value' (39%). Most likely to answer 'good value' are ratepayers aged 65+ (49%). Among residential ratepayers who currently pay under \$1,000 in general rates, the results are 46% good and 16% poor. Among those who currently pay \$2,000 or more, it is 23% good and 41% poor.

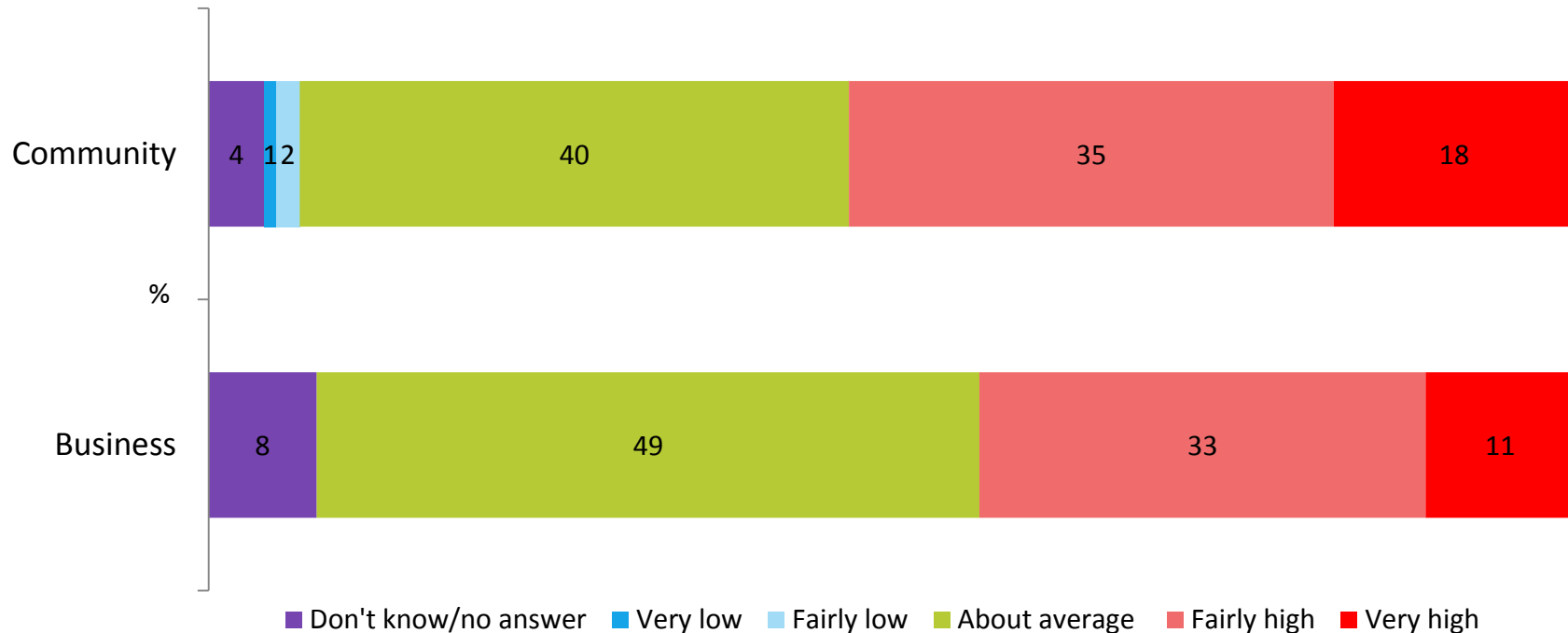


**QB3.** How would you rate the services and facilities provided by Singleton Council given what you pay in rates?  
**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Singleton Council rates high, average or low?

## Community and Business

When studying views on future rate increases, it is crucial to check whether ratepayers think the current rates are high, average or low. Among business ratepayers, 44% answer 'high', 49% 'average', and no-one says 'low'. Among residential ratepayers, it is 53% high, 40% average and 3% low. Among those currently paying \$2,000 or more in general rates, 75% think rates are high. Even among those currently paying under \$1,000, only 2% think rates are low and 42% think they are high.



**QB1.** Based on the knowledge you have or overall impression you have, are the Council rates in Singleton high, low or average? Would you say...?

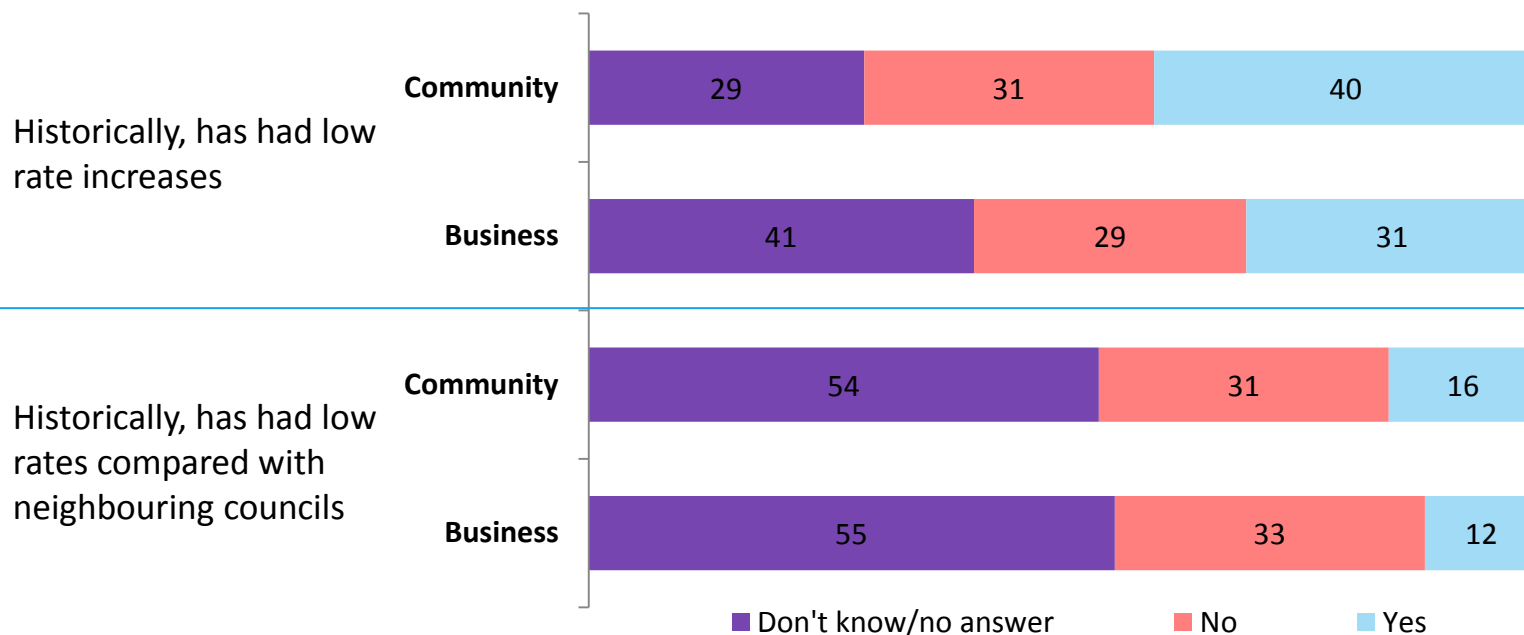
**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Perception of historic level of rates/rate rises

## Community and Business

As shown on the previous slide, many Singleton ratepayers tend to think rates are high, even though the hard evidence suggests otherwise. This disconnect is also illustrated in the results below, along with the limited knowledge that ratepayers have.

Most residential ratepayers (54%) and business ratepayers (55%) don't know whether Singleton has had historically low rates compared with neighbouring councils and more say 'no' than say 'yes'. Asked whether rate increases have been historically low, the results are split between yes, no, and don't know.



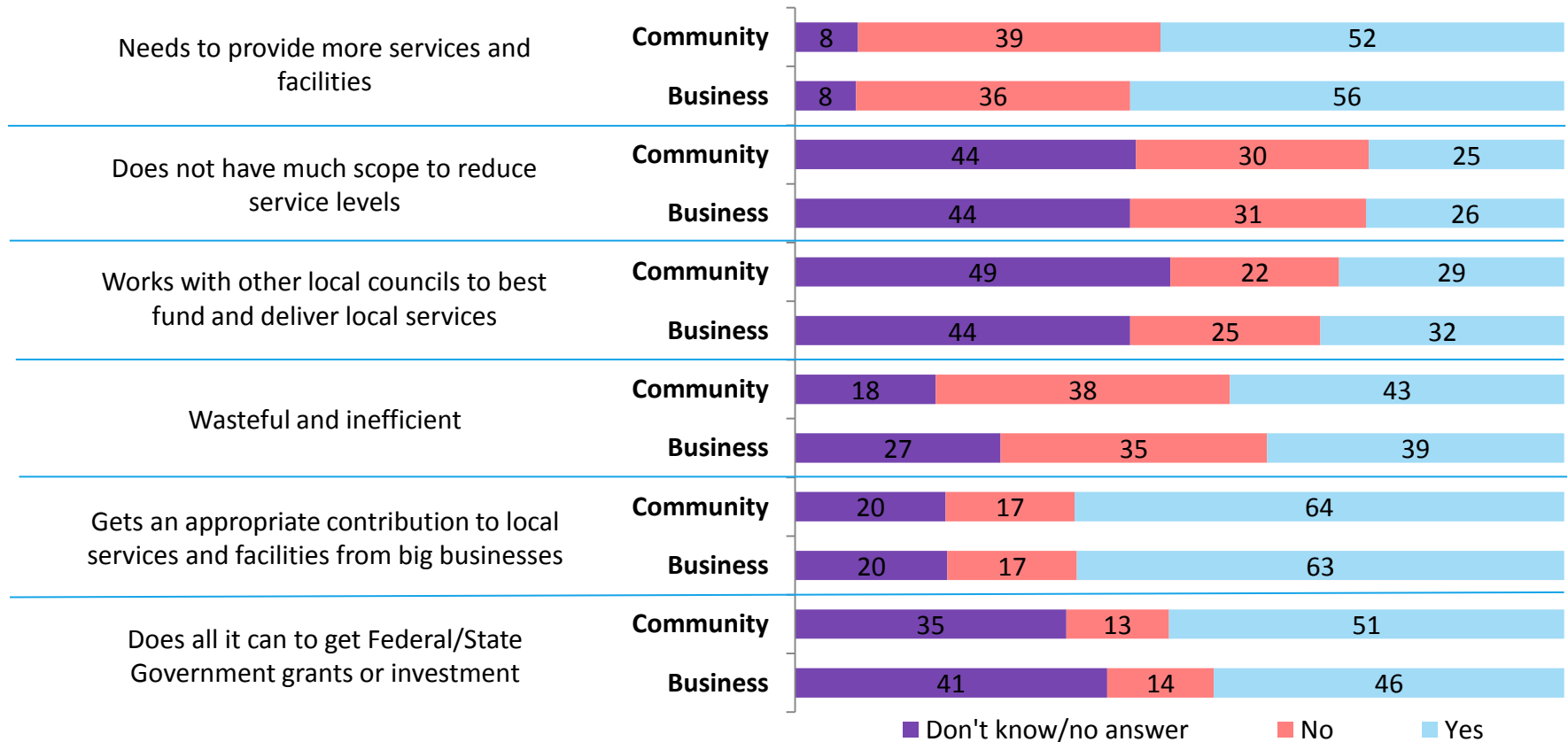
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Other perceptions of Singleton Council

## Community and Business

Two in five residential ratepayers (43%) and business ratepayers (39%) have a perception of Singleton Council as being '*wasteful and inefficient*'. This is significant because it is difficult to make a case for increased rates to ratepayers who have a perception of waste or inefficiency.



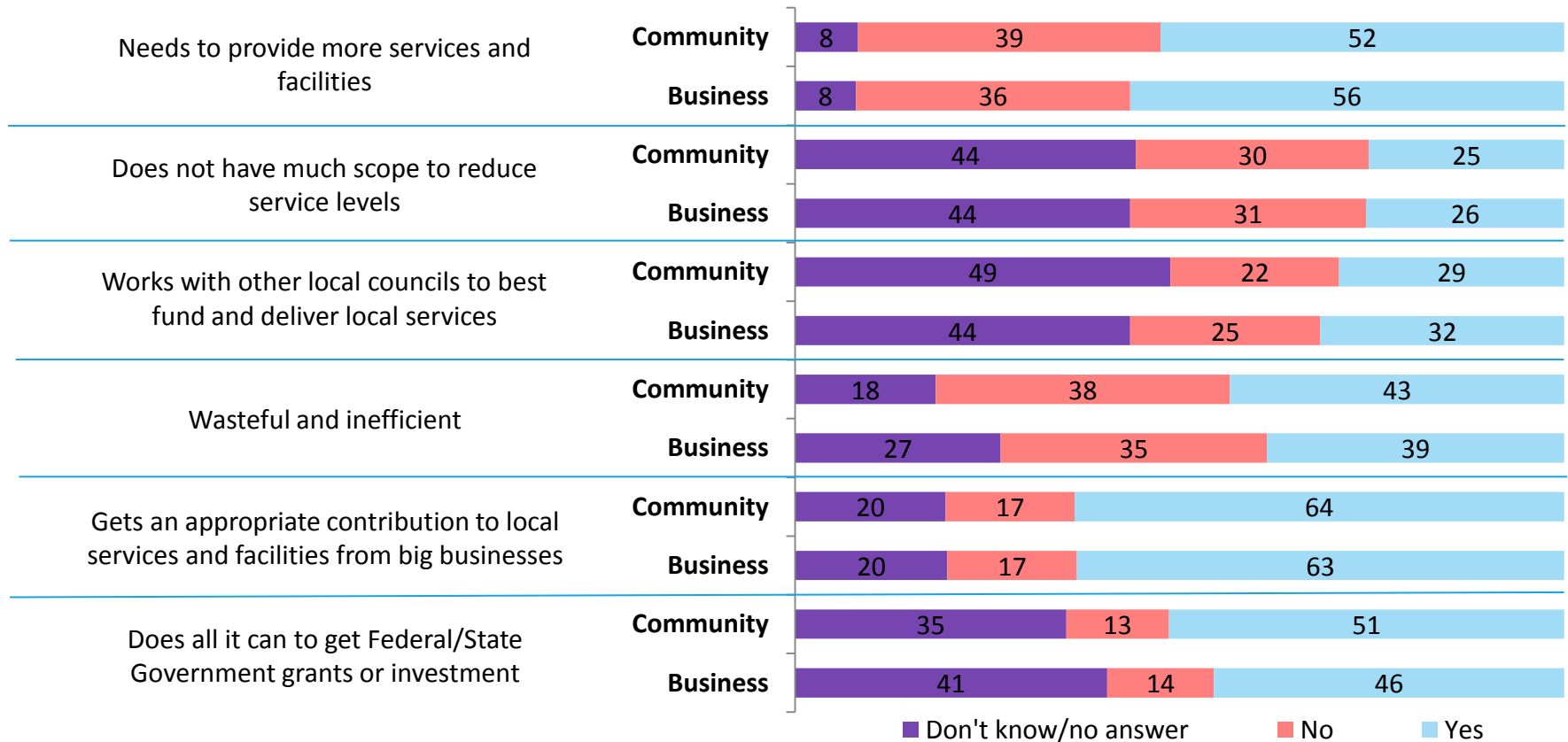
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Other perceptions of Singleton Council (cont'd)

## Community and Business

Most ratepayers think that big business pays its way, and half think Singleton Council does all it can to get Federal/State Government grants/investment. Many don't know about working with other councils or scope for reduced service levels. However, half think there is a need for more services and facilities.



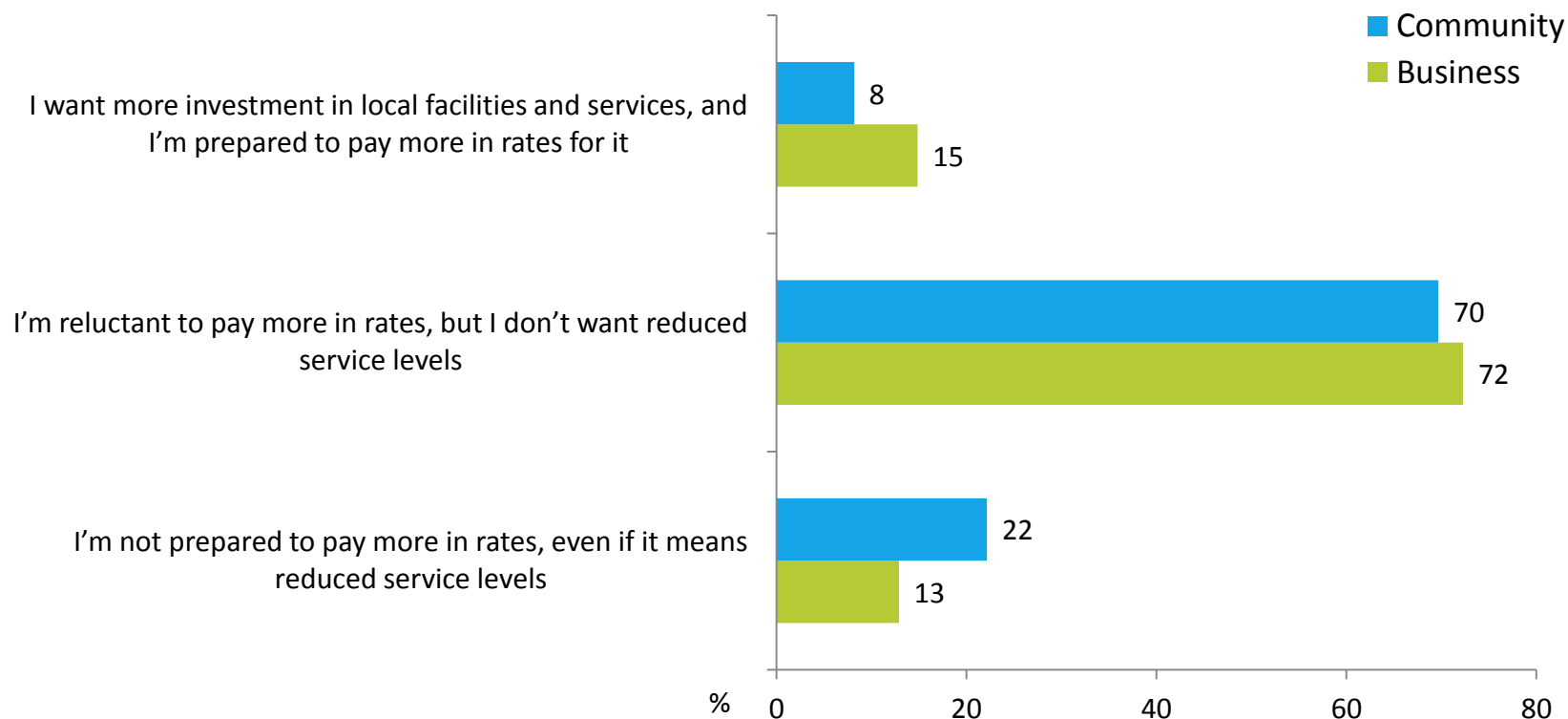
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Position on principle of paying more

## Community and Business

The proportion positioning themselves in the category *'I want more investment in local facilities and services, and I'm prepared to pay more in rates for it'* is just one in seven (15%) among business ratepayers, and fewer than one in ten (8%) among residential ratepayers. One in five residential ratepayers (22%) are *'not prepared to pay more in rates even if it means reduced service levels'*.



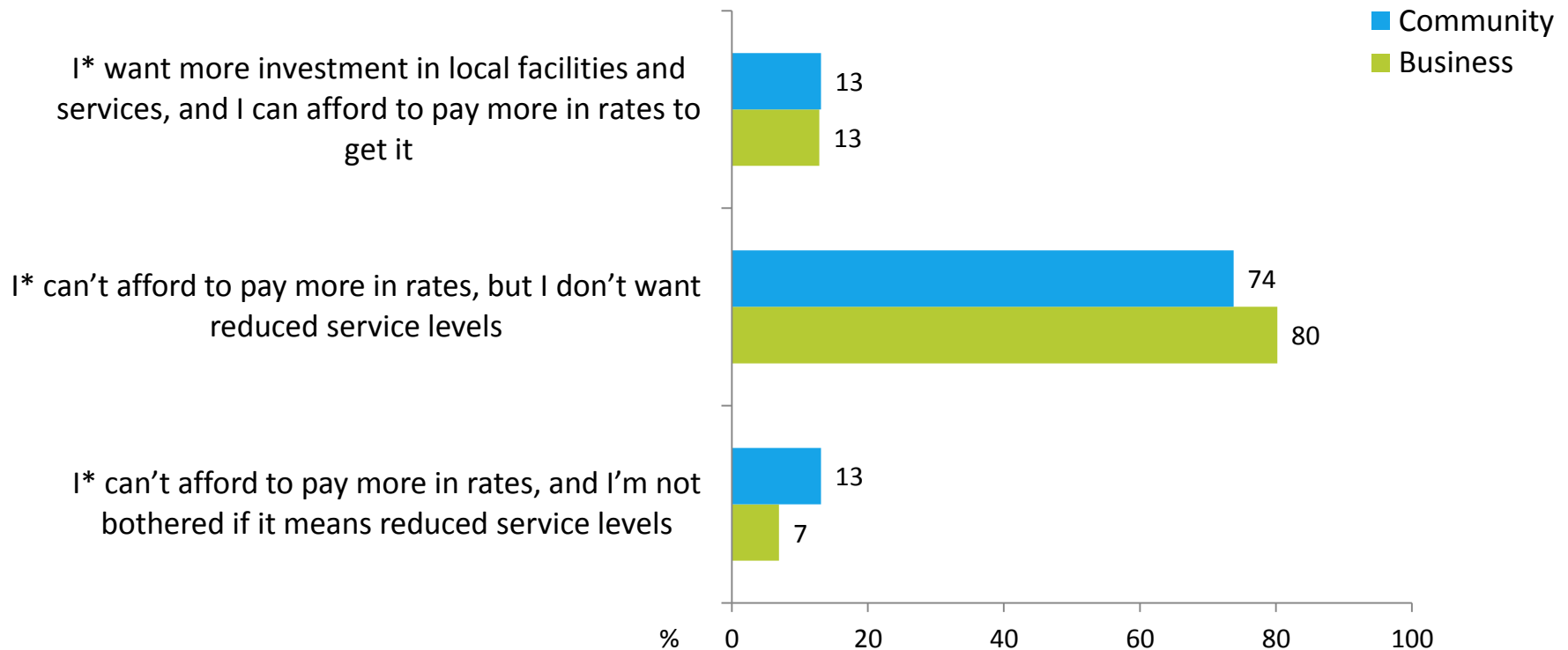
**QB4.** Which of these statements best describes your own view when you think about the balance between the level of rates and the level of services/facilities?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Whether can afford to pay more

## Community and Business

Most residential ratepayers (74%) and business ratepayers (80%) take the view *'I can't afford to pay more in rates but I don't want reduced service levels'*. Only one in eight (13%) answer *'I want more investment in local facilities and services and I can afford to pay more in rates to get it'*.



\*'we' businesses survey

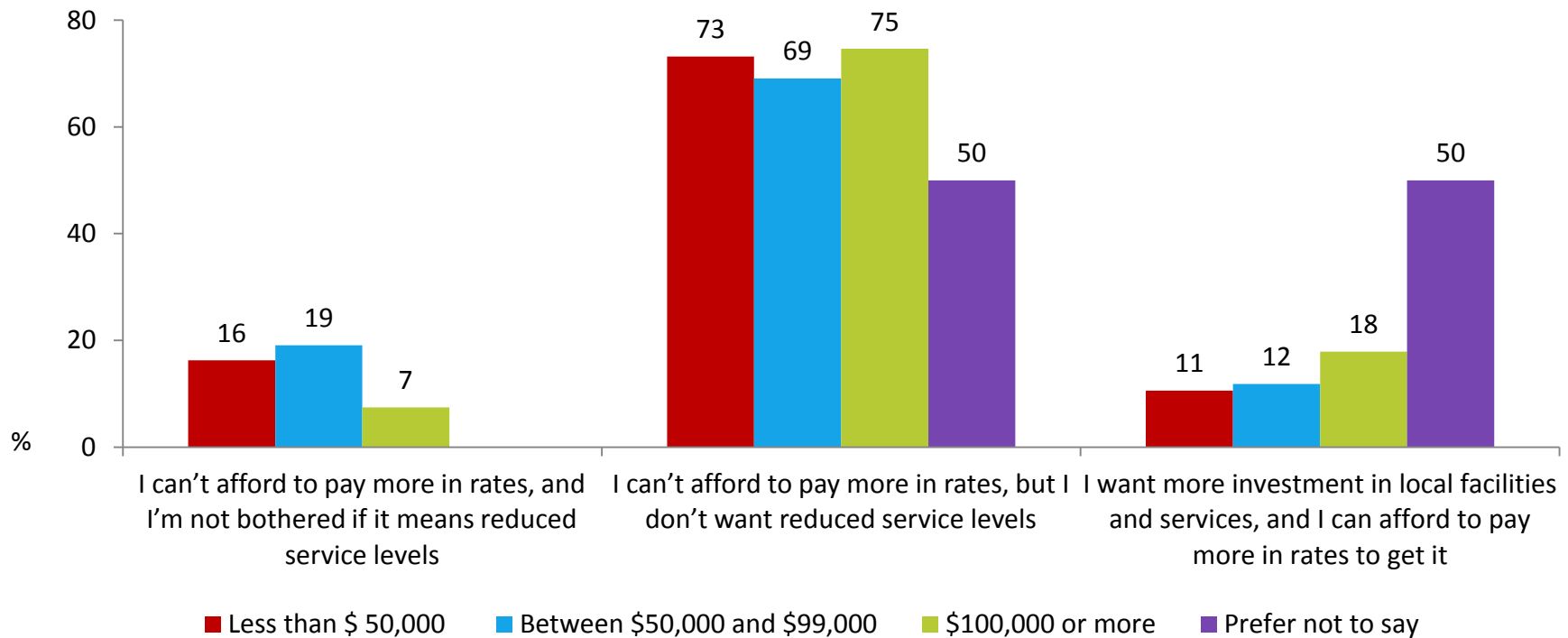
**QB5.** Which of these statements best describes [your own situation/the situation for your business]?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Whether can afford to pay more

## Community by income

Residential ratepayers on higher incomes are marginally more likely to say they can afford to pay more in rates to fund greater investment but the difference is not statistically significant (at the 95% level). Note that a high proportion of those who did not disclose their income (50%) say they could afford to pay more, suggesting these respondents are probably at the higher rather than lower end of the income range, although there is no clear relationship between income and perceived affordability for a desired increase in investment.



**QB5.** Which of these statements best describes your own situation?

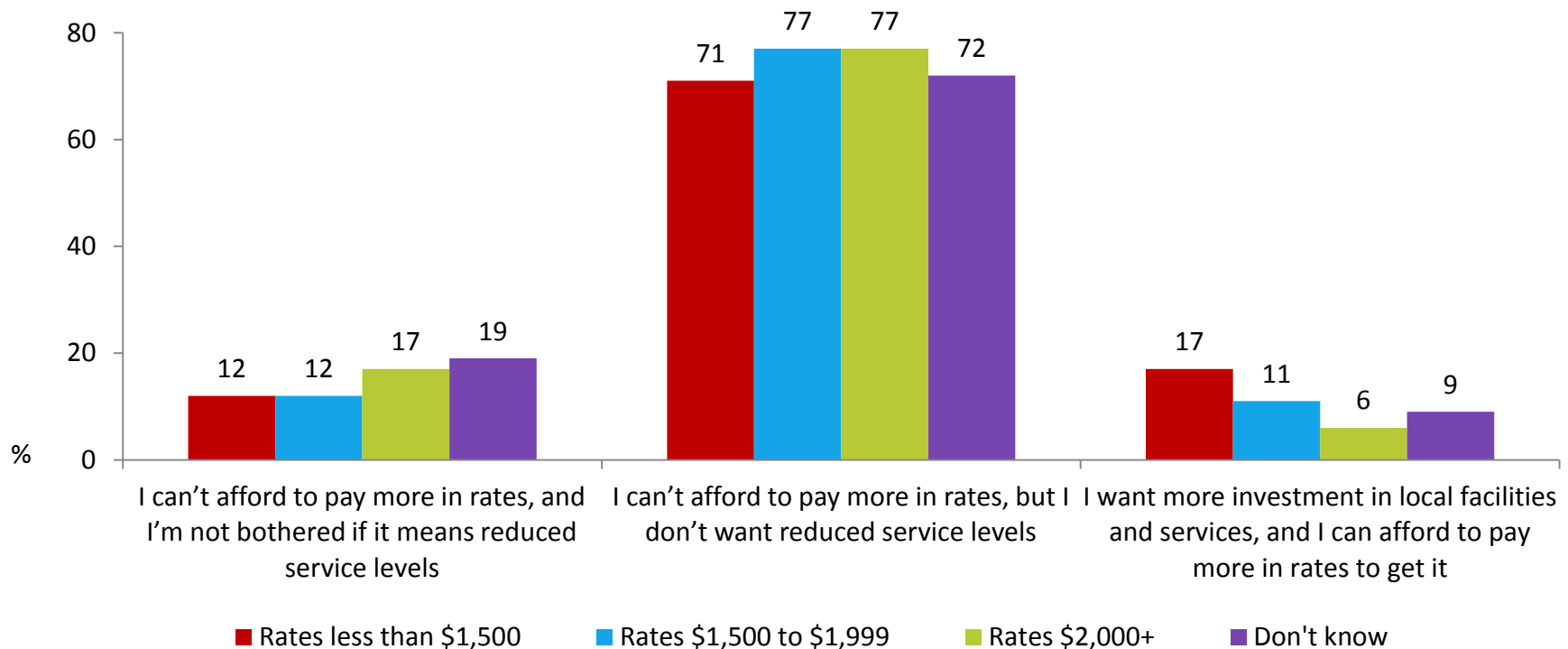
**Bases:** Less than \$50K = 123; \$50-99K = 110; \$100K+ = 134; Prefer not to say = 98



# Whether can afford to pay more

## Community by rates currently pay

When we study the results by the rates currently paid by residential ratepayers, most within each category take the view *'I can't afford to pay more in rates but I don't want reduced service levels'*. However, there is a significant difference for *'I want more investment in local facilities and services, and I can afford to pay more in rates to get it'* – 17% of those currently paying less than \$1,500 and just 6% of those paying \$2,000 or more give this answer. Note that this proportion is also significantly lower (at 7%) among ratepayers aged under 45.



**QB5.** Which of these statements best describes your own situation?

**Base:** Rates less than \$1,500 = 214; rates \$1,500-\$1,999 = 154; rates \$2,000+ = 64; don't know = 32

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## Scenarios facing Singleton Council

# Briefing on 'Fit for the Future'

## Community and Business

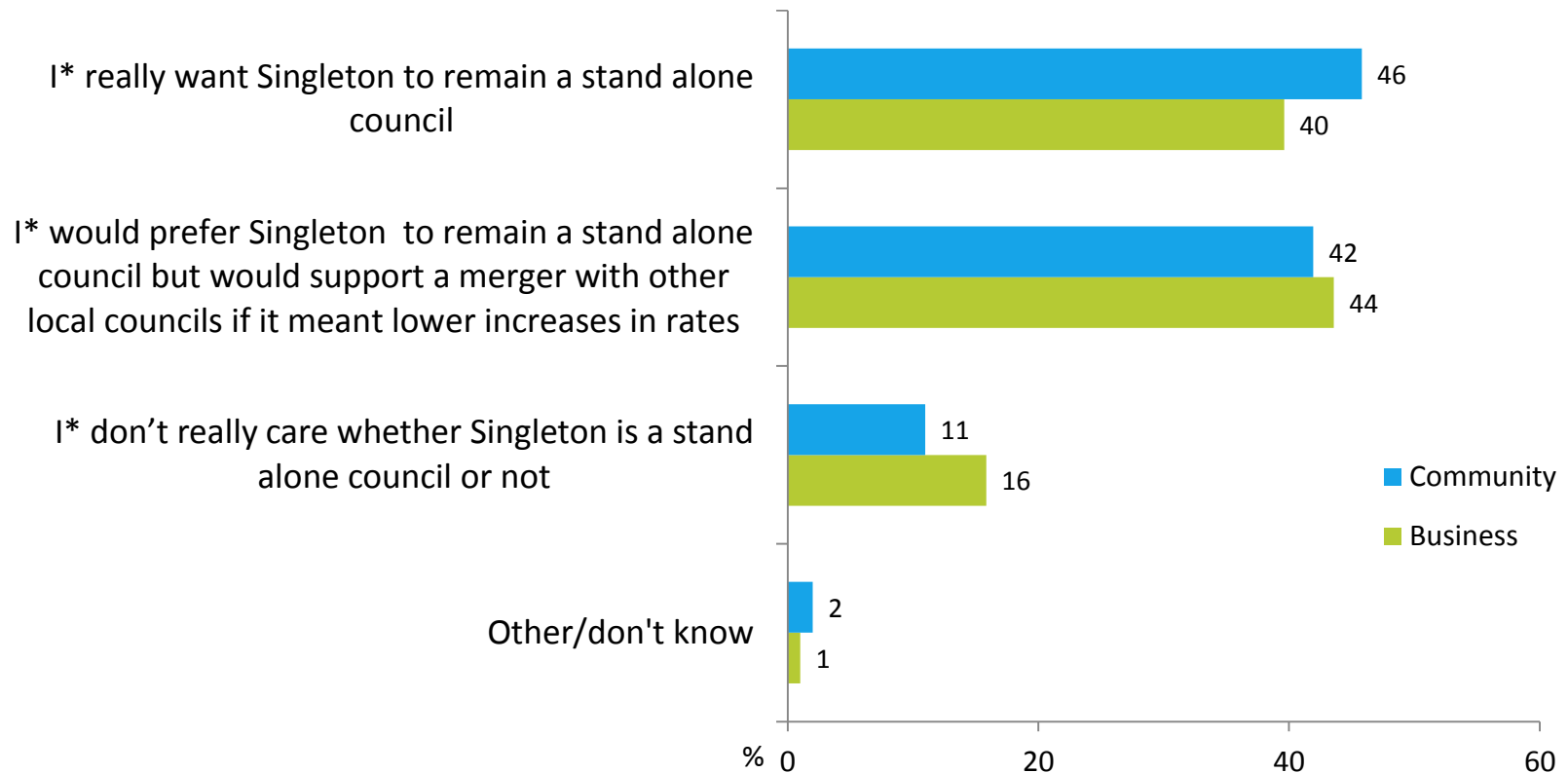
Survey respondents were informed about the 'Fit for the Future' review, with the following preamble before being asked about the principle of Singleton being a stand alone council:

*A recent State Government review of local councils in NSW called 'Fit for the Future' has suggested that Singleton can remain a stand alone Council without having to merge with neighbouring councils, although it would need to raise more revenue to be able to renew local assets and maintain services.*

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community and Business

Ratepayers are split between 'I *really* want Singleton to remain a stand alone council' (46% of residential ratepayers, 40% of business ratepayers) and 'would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates' (42% and 44% respectively). The results suggest that financial pragmatism at least matches principled views on independence.



\*'we' businesses survey

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up [your own view/the view of your business]?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by gender and age

There are no significant differences in views between men and women, but the data suggests that older ratepayers are more likely to want Singleton to remain a stand alone council.

	All	Men	Women	Aged under 45	Aged 45-54	Aged 55-64	Aged 65+
	(n=465)	(n=210)	(n=255)	(n=96)	(n=139)	(n=121)	(n=109)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	44	47	39	40	50	54
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	43	41	46	46	42	33
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	11	11	15	12	6	13
Other	1	1	0	1	1	1	0
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	0	1	0	1	1	0

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by location and household composition

In response to an earlier question, it was revealed that ratepayers living out-of-town are significantly more likely to perceive poor value for what they currently pay in rates, even though they typically pay less in rates and are not more likely to think rates are high. Here, we can see that they are less likely to really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council (39% give this answer).

Single people are especially likely to not care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not (22%).

	All	Live in town	Live out-of-town	Couple, no kids	Family, most kids under 16	Family, most kids aged 16+	Other composition
	(n=465)	(n=317)	(n=148)	(n=133)	(n=158)	(n=100)	(n=74)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	49	39	54	43	44	38
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	39	47	41	44	42	41
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	10	13	5	13	10	22
Other	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	0	1	0	0	2	0

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by income and home ownership

Those on middle incomes, between \$50-99,000, are most likely to give the pragmatic answer '*I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates*' (52% do so). Similarly those with a mortgage (50%) whereas a majority of those who own their home outright (53%) respond '*I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council*'.

	All	Income under \$50K	Income \$50-99K	Income \$100K+	Prefer not to say income	Own home outright	Buying home with mortgage
	(n=465)	(n=123)	(n=110)	(n=134)	(n=98)	(n=260)	(n=204)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	46	39	49	49	53	36
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	40	52	37	40	35	50
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	13	6	13	11	12	10
Other	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	0	3	0	0	0	1

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by rates pay and perceived affordability

There is a considerable difference of view between those who say they want more investment in local facilities and services and can afford to pay more (66% *'really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council'*) and those who say they can't afford to pay more (43%). The data also suggests that the financial pragmatists tend to be those currently paying the lowest rates rather than those paying the highest – 52% of those paying less than \$1,000, compared with 41% of those paying \$2,000+.

	All	Rates less than \$1000	Rates \$1,000 to \$1499	Rates \$1500 to \$1999	Rates \$2000+	Can afford to pay more	Can't afford to pay more
	(n=465)	(n=50)	(n=164)	(n=155)	(n=64)	(n=61)	(n=404)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	40	46	41	48	66	43
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	52	40	45	41	26	44
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	6	13	11	11	7	12
Other	1	0	1	1	0	2	0
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	2	0	1	0	0	1

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table



# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by perception of current level of rates

Among those who think that the current rates are very high, three in five (61%) take the view '*I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates*'. The table below emphasises how perceptions of how high or low rates are impacts on views about whether Singleton should remain a stand alone council.

	All	Rates very high	Rates fairly high	Rates average	Rates low	Don't know
	(n=465)	(n=82)	(n=165)	(n=187)	(n=12)	(n=19)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	27	44	53	58	63
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	61	45	33	17	37
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	12	10	12	25	0
Other	1	0	1	1	0	0
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	0	1	1	0	0

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by perception of value

Similarly, there is a clear relationship between perceived value for money for the current rates paid and views on whether Singleton should remain a stand alone council. Among those who perceive good value, three in five (63%) 'really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council', twice the level as for those who perceive poor value (32%).

	All	Good value	OK	Poor value
	(n=465)	(n=152)	(n=180)	(n=129)
	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	63	42	32
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	27	49	50
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	9	8	17
Other	1	1	1	1
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	1	1	1

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council

## Community by service use and preferred relationship

Among those who think they use or benefit from council services, more than half (55%) take the view '*I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council*', compared with just 37% of those who don't think they use or benefit from council services. Those who just want to pay rates and use services and not be contacted by Singleton Council, are significantly more likely to take the view '*I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not*', compared with just 8% of those who want to be consulted or more involved. However, large proportions of each group are financial pragmatists.

	All	Service user	Not service user	Don't want contact	Consult me	Involve me
	(n=465)	(n=223)	(n=241)	(n=99)	(n=283)	(n=76)
	%	%	%	%	%	%
I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council	46	55	37	38	47	51
I would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates	42	38	46	39	44	39
I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not	11	7	15	21	8	8
Other	1	0	1	1	1	0
Don't know enough to comment/can't say	1	0	1	0	0	1

**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; bases for sub-groups shown in brackets in the table

# Scenarios Facing Singleton Council

## Community and Business

Prior to being asked the key questions about the two scenarios facing Singleton Council, survey respondents were briefed as follows:

*Given the level of investment needed in local assets and facilities, and the cost of running services, Singleton Council has calculated that it would need a 9.75% increase in rates for each of the next 4 years to continue providing services at the current level and meet the NSW Government's 'Fit for the Future' requirements. Over the 4 years, this would be an increase in general rates **[of between 35-40%/for businesses of around 53%]***

*As you may know, any increase in rates above the general inflation adjustment, known as the rate peg, has to be approved by the NSW State regulator, IPART.*

*For the 4 years from 2016/2017, there are effectively two options for Singleton Council and its ratepayers:*

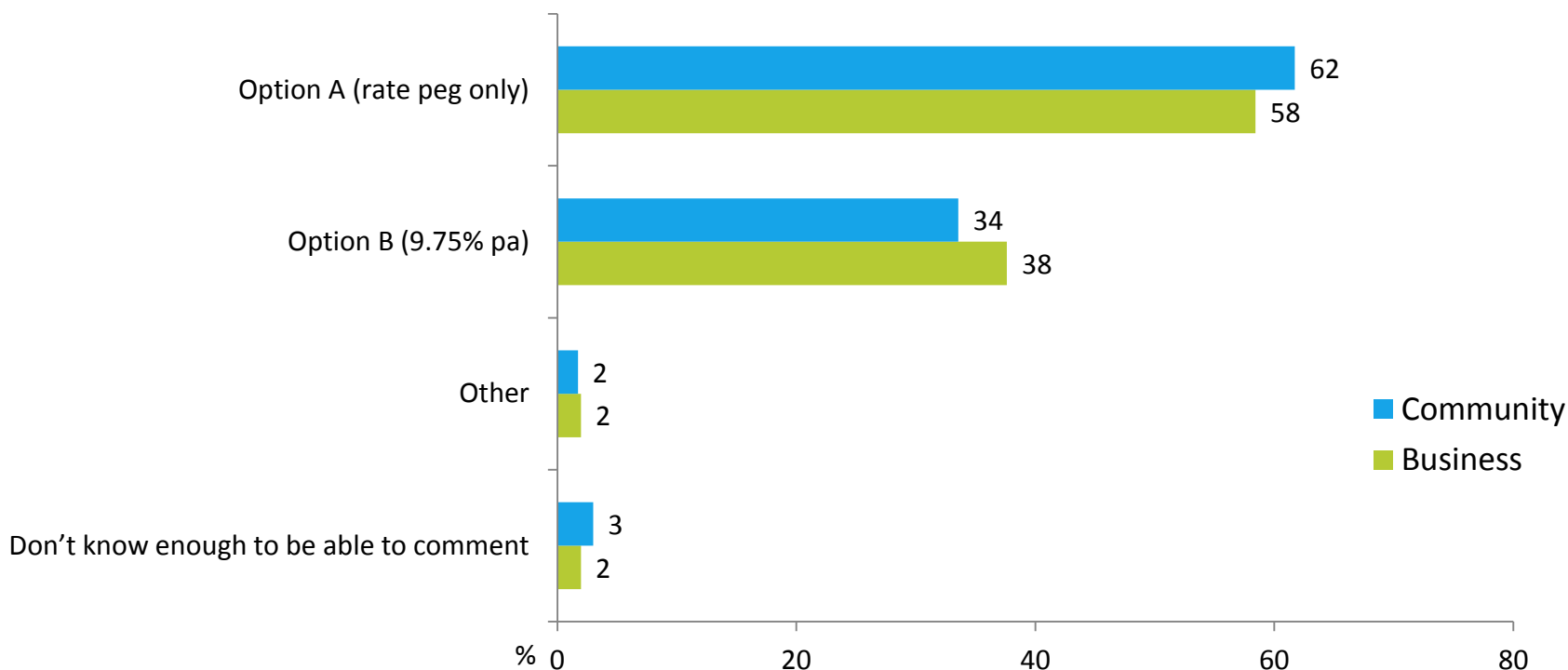
*Option A would be rates only increasing by the annual rate peg, at around 2.5% per annum. Singleton Council would not have the funds to renew or maintain local assets. Singleton Council would need to change, reduce or no longer provide some services to be able to fund asset renewal and maintenance.*

*Option B would be a 9.75% rate increase for each of the next 4 years, which would include the annual rate peg of around 2.5% per annum. It would be an increase in general rates of **[35-40% over the 4 years/ for businesses of around 53%]**. This would enable Singleton Council to continue to provide the current level and range of services, carry out maintenance and renew assets. Even after a 9.75% per annum increase, Singleton's rates would remain among the lowest for equivalent councils in NSW.*

# Initial A/B preference with 'other' and 'don't know'

## Community and Business

Given the two options, a clear majority of both residential ratepayers (62%) and business ratepayers (58%) respond by saying that Singleton Council should choose Option A, whilst just over one in three think Singleton Council should choose Option B (34% of residential ratepayers and 38% of business ratepayers). A small number answer 'other' or 'don't know enough to be able to comment' but then each of these gave a preference for A or B in the next question so the final preferences can be shown (see the next set of slides).



**QC2.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose?

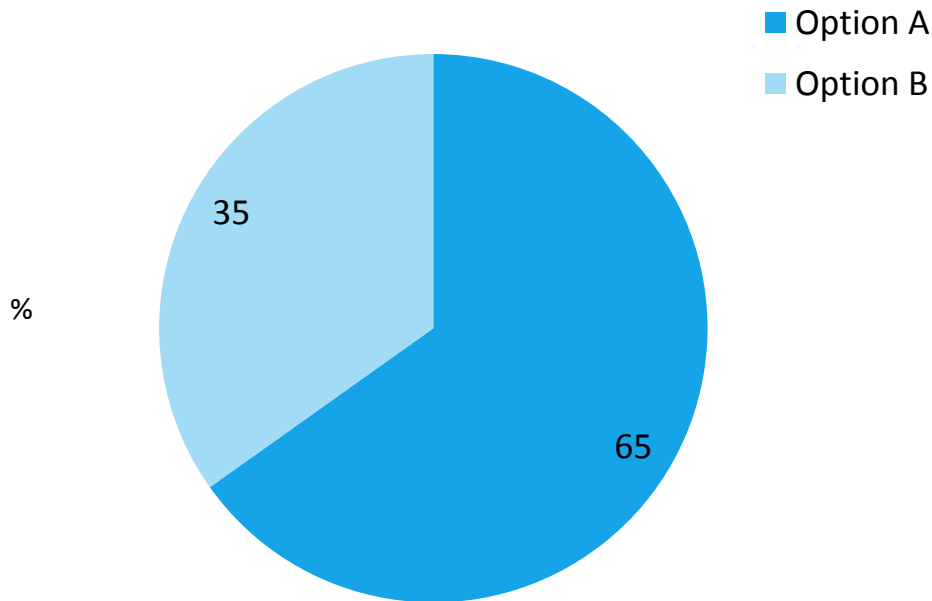
**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Final preferences for A or B

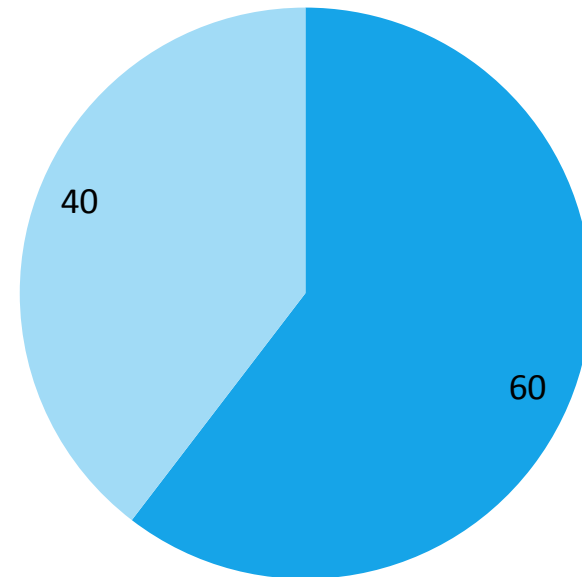
## Community and Business

With all ratepayers expressing a preference for A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa), the final preferences are 65% A/35% B for residential ratepayers and 60% A/40% B for business ratepayers.

**Community**



**Business**



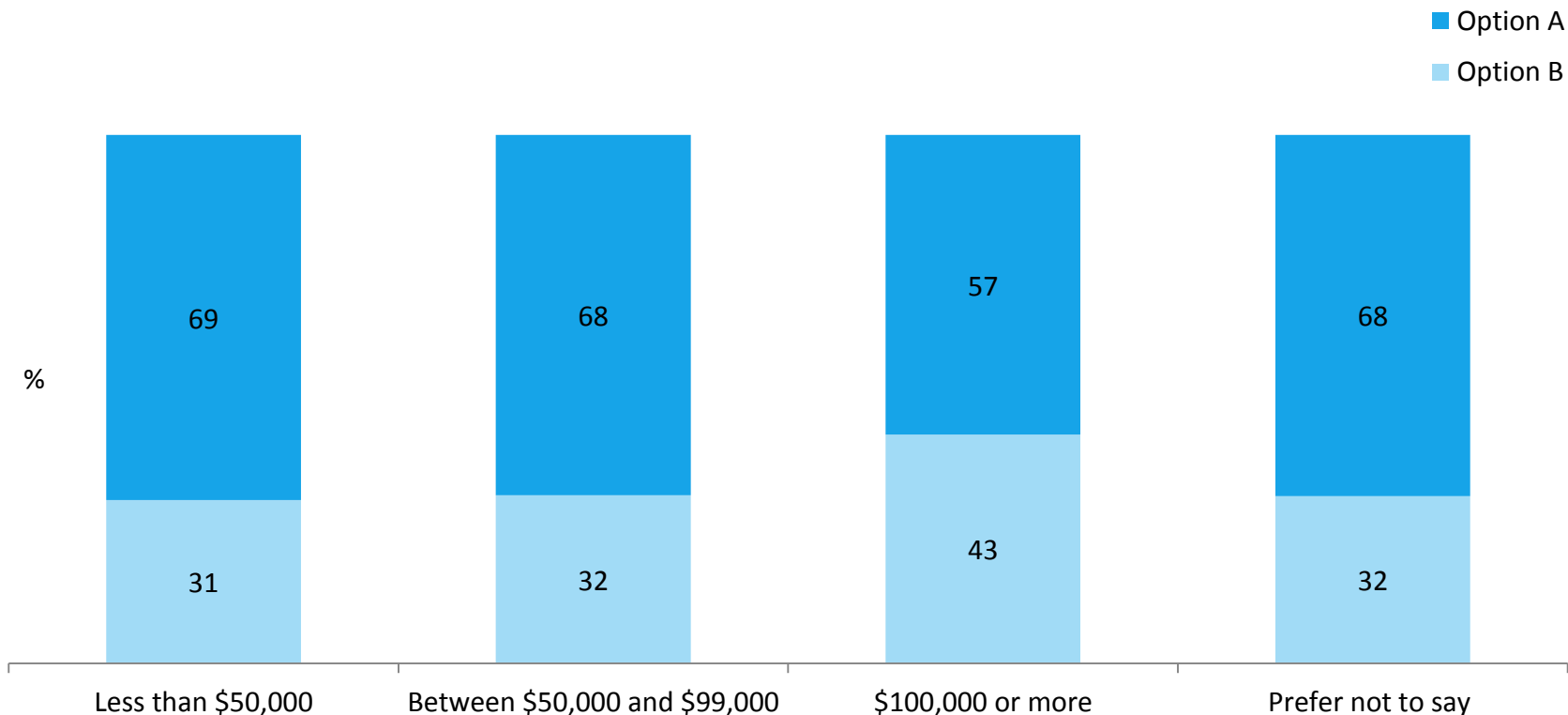
**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

## Community by income

In each of the low, middle and high income groups, a clear majority of residential ratepayers express a preference for Option A, the rate peg only increase, despite being informed that this would mean a shortfall in funds for asset renewal and adverse impacts on services.



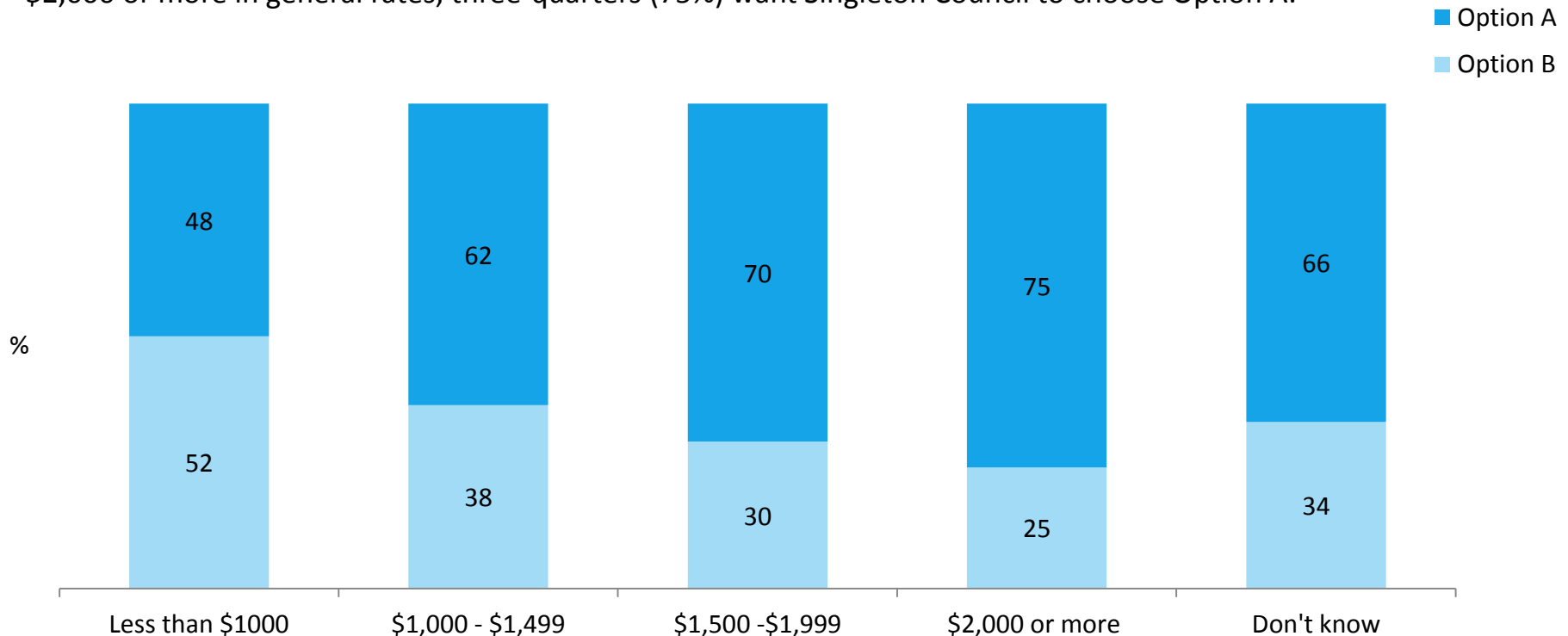
**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

**Bases:** Less than \$50K = 123; \$50-99K = 110; \$100K+ = 134; Prefer not to say = 98

# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

## Community by rates pay

There is a clear relationship between the option preferred and the amount currently paid in rates. Among residential ratepayers who say they currently pay less than \$1,000 in general rates, around half think Singleton Council should choose Option A (48%) and half Option B (52%). Among those who say they are currently paying \$2,000 or more in general rates, three-quarters (75%) want Singleton Council to choose Option A.



**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

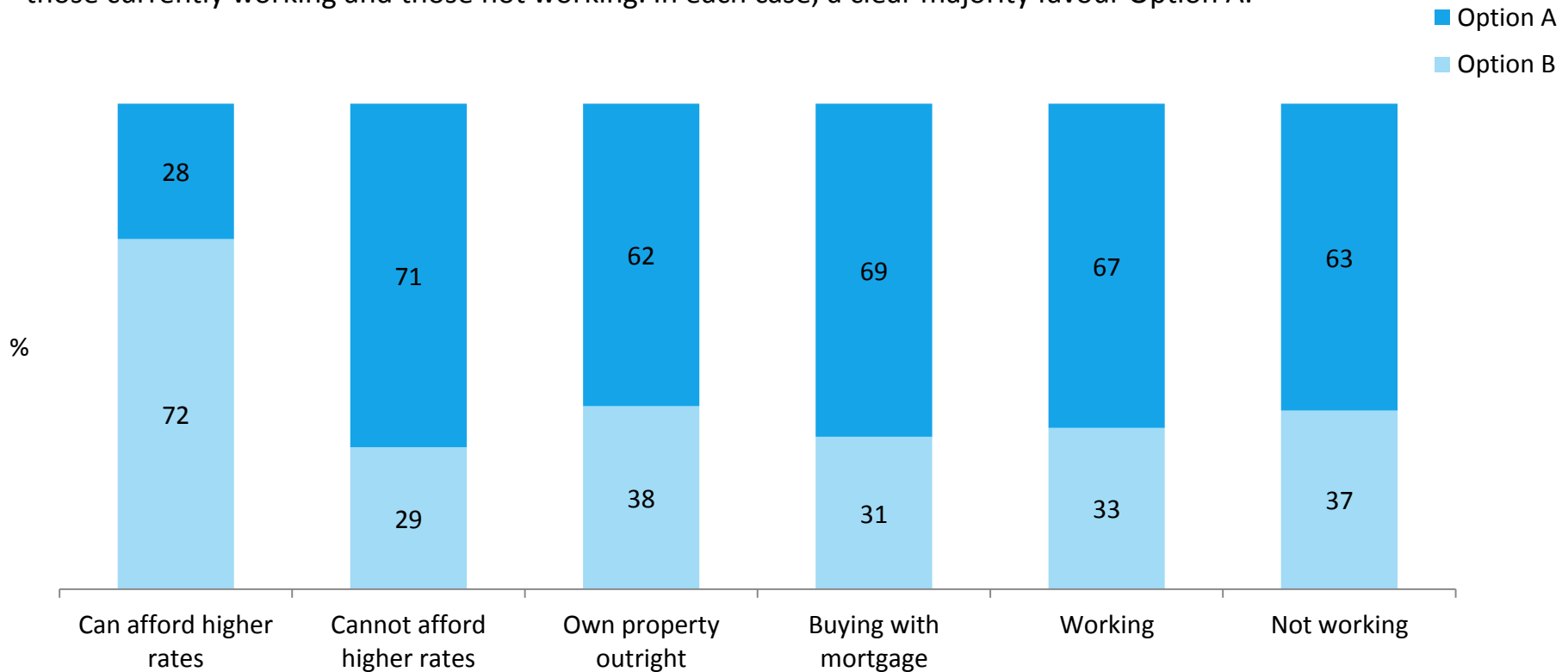
**Bases:** Less than \$1,000 = 50; \$1,000-\$1,499 = 164; \$1,500-\$1,999 = 155; \$2,000+ = 64; don't know = 32.



# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

## Community by can afford, own property outright, working

Among those residential ratepayers who say they can afford to pay more, seven in ten (72%) prefer Option B. Among those who say they cannot afford to pay more, seven in ten (71%) prefer Option A. There is no difference though between those who own their property outright and those with a mortgage, or between those currently working and those not working. In each case, a clear majority favour Option A.



**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

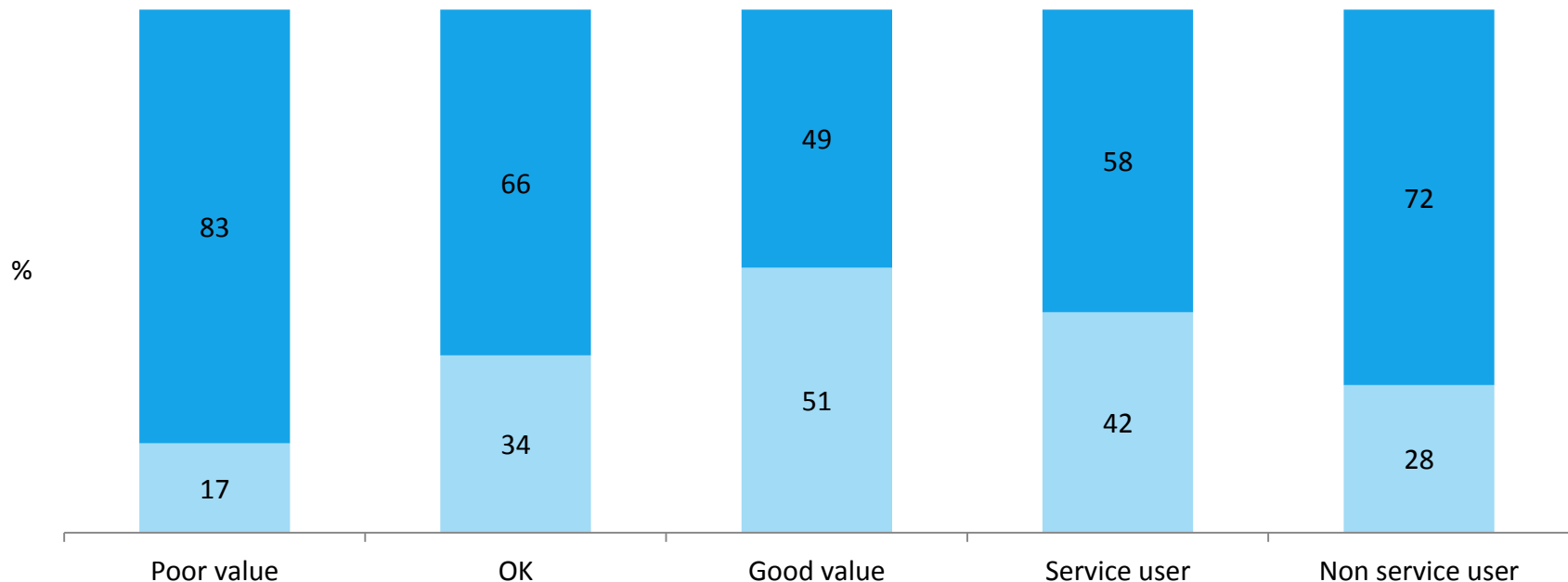
**Bases:** Can afford = 61; can't afford = 404; own outright = 260; mortgage = 204; working = 253; not working = 212

# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

## Community by service user, value rating

Residential ratepayers who consider themselves to use or benefit from local services and facilities are more likely to think Singleton Council should choose Option B (42% do so) but, even here, a majority (58%) favour Option A. Among 'non service users', seven in ten (72%) prefer Option A. Those who think they get good value for what they currently pay are evenly split between Option A (49%) and Option B (51%). In contrast, those who think they currently get poor value are very much in favour of Option A (83% A, 17% B).

■ Option A  
■ Option B



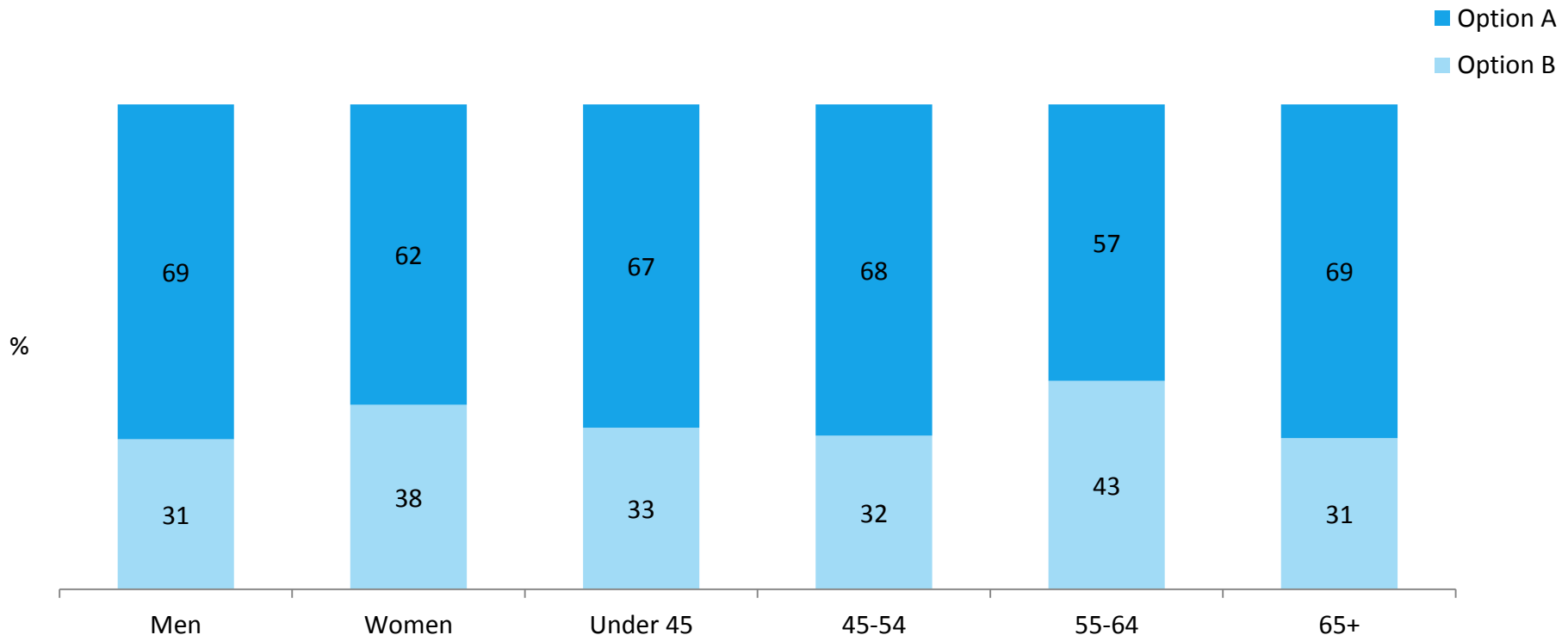
**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

**Bases:** Poor value = 129; OK = 180; good value = 152; service user = 223; non-service user = 241

# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

## Community by gender, age

There are no statistically significant differences in preferences by gender or age.



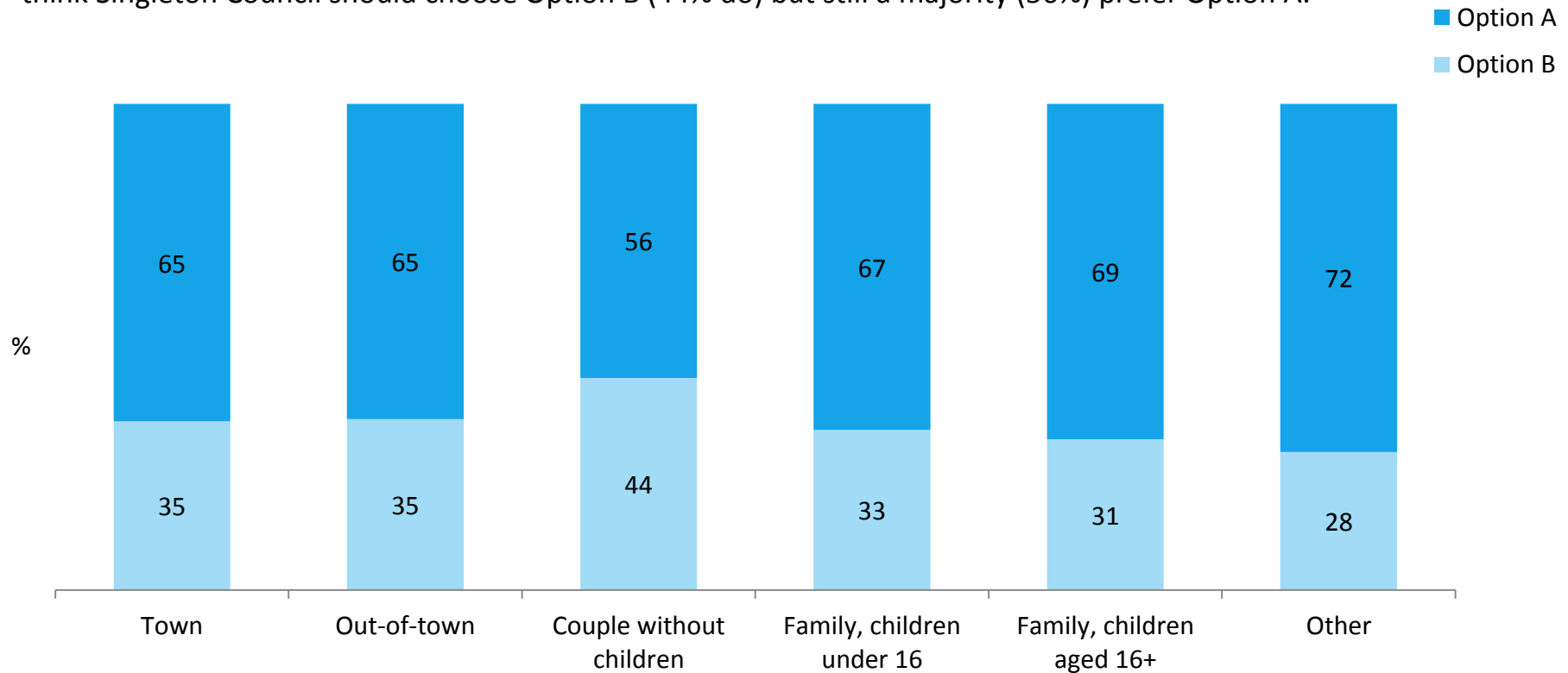
**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

**Bases:** Men = 210; women = 255; under 45 = 96; 45-54 = 139; 55-64 = 121; 65+ = 109

# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

## Community by location, household composition

Despite residential ratepayers who live outside the town of Singleton being more likely to think they get poor value for what they currently pay in rates, there is no difference in the preferences expressed by those living in the town and those out-of-town – 65% A and 35% B in each case. Couples without children are more likely to think Singleton Council should choose Option B (44% do) but still a majority (56%) prefer Option A.



**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

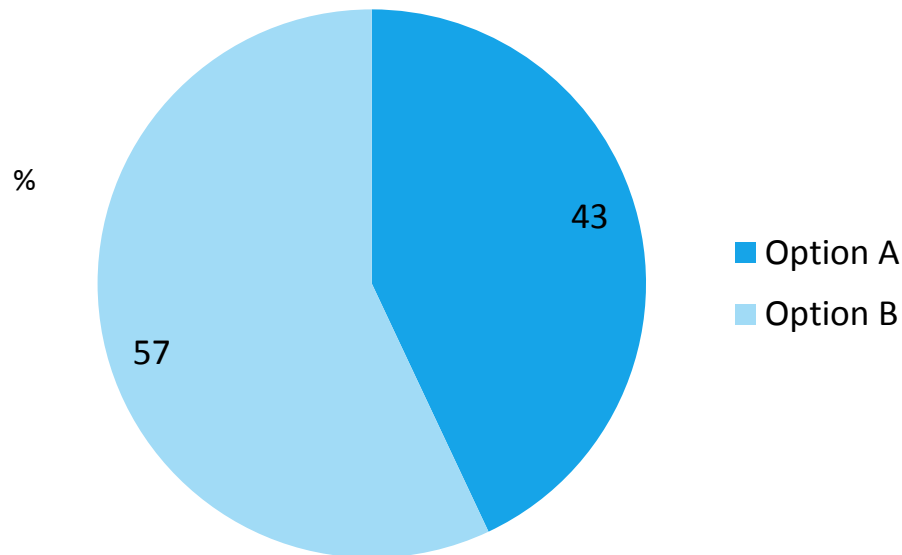
**Bases:** Town = 317; out-of-town = 148; couple, no kids = 133; family, kids under 16 = 100; family, kids 16+ = 158; other = 74

# Preferred option: A (rate peg only) or B (9.75% pa)

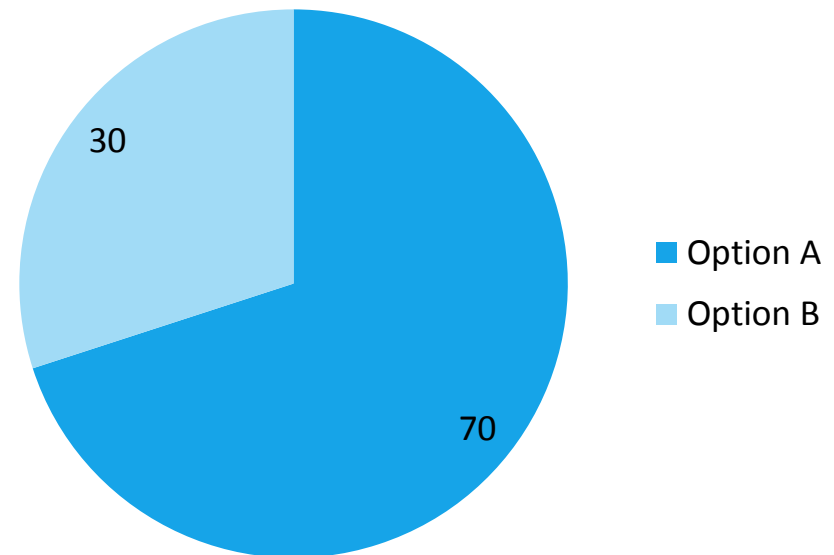
## Business by annual amount paid in general rates

Among business ratepayers who say they currently pay under \$1,500 in general rates, a majority (57%) think Singleton Council should choose Option B. Among those who say they currently pay \$1,500 or more, seven in ten (70%) think that Singleton Council should choose Option A.

**Currently pay under \$1,500  
(n=35)**



**Currently pay \$1,500+  
(n=56)**



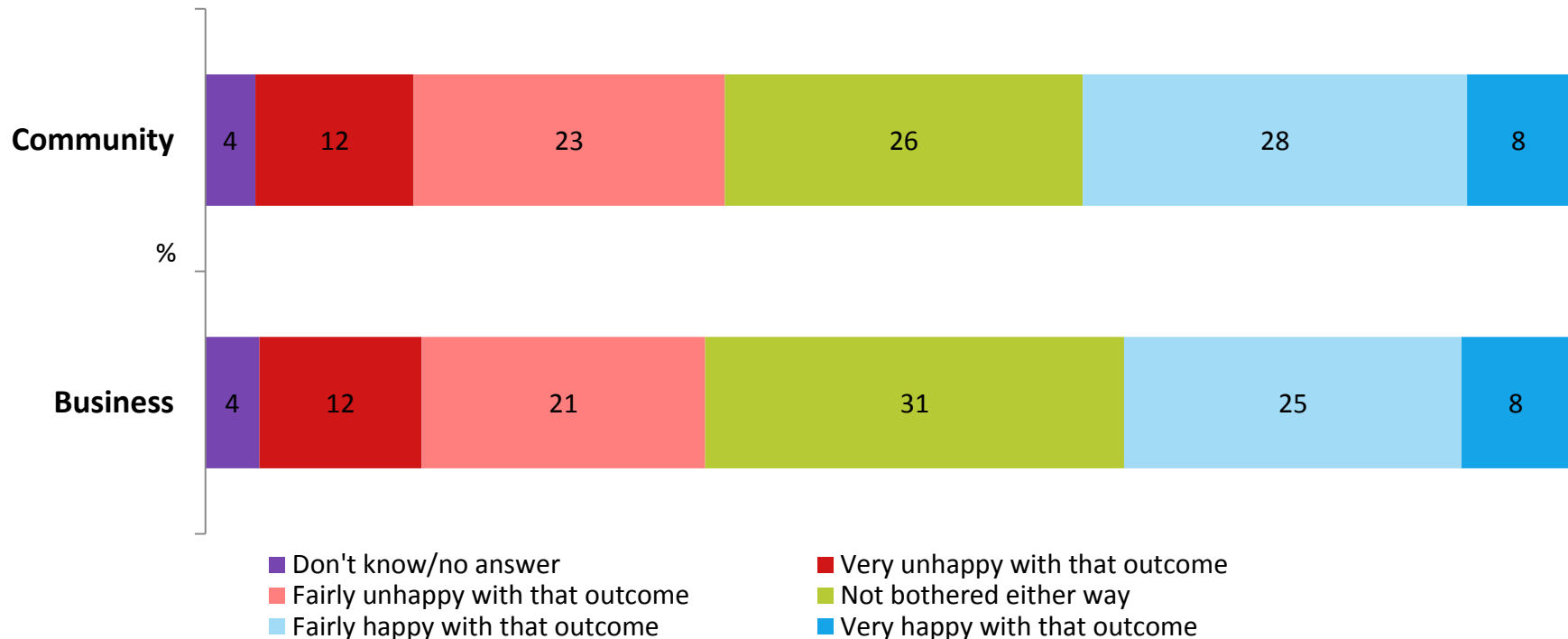
**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

**Base:** Total business sample, n=101.

# Reaction if Council chose Option A

## Community and Business

Ratepayers were asked how they would react if Singleton Council chose Option A. The results are mixed. For residential ratepayers, 36% would be happy with that outcome, 35% would be unhappy, and 26% would not be bothered either way. For business ratepayers, 33% would be happy with that outcome, 33% would be unhappy, and 31% would not be bothered either way.



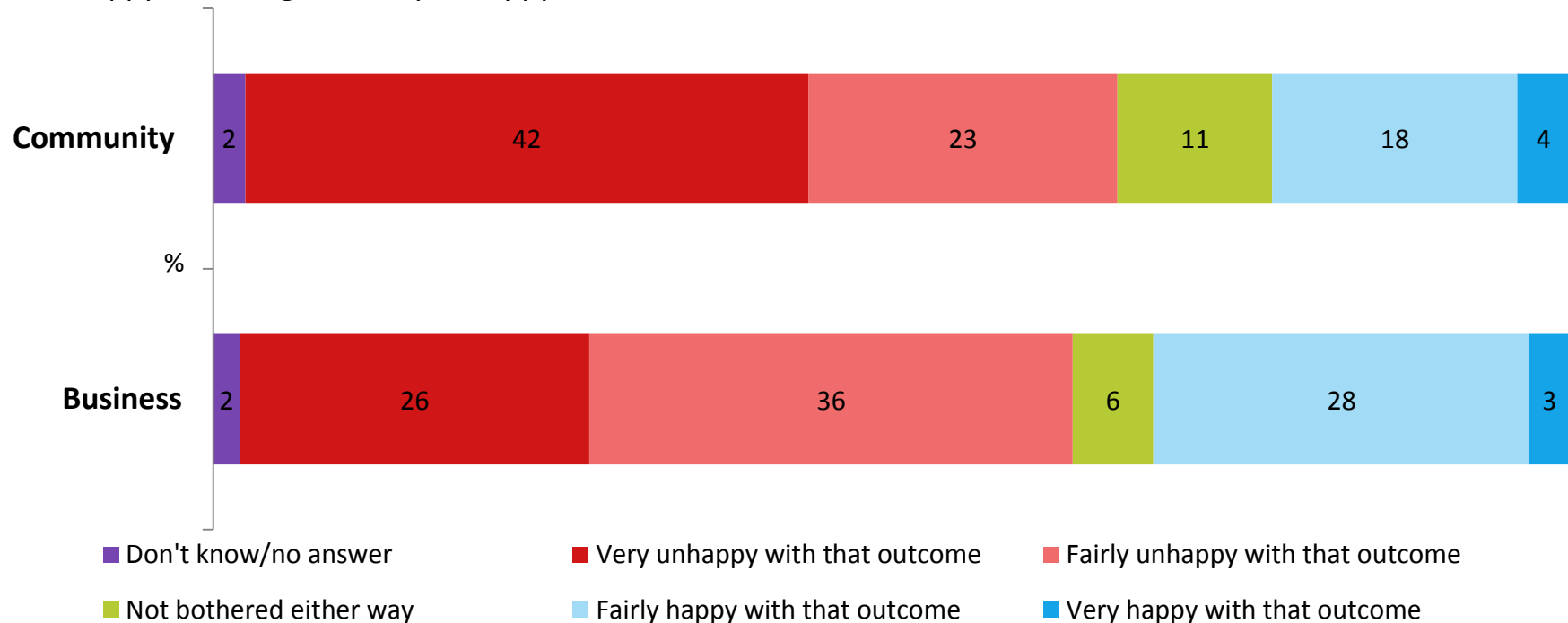
**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A (rates only increasing by the annual rate peg, around 2.5% per annum, Singleton Council not having enough resources to renew and maintain local assets, having to change, reduce or no longer provide some services) how would you react?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Reaction if Council chose Option B

## Community and Business

Ratepayers were also asked how they would react if Singleton Council chose Option B. Here, the results are heavily weighted to the negative, with greater strength of feeling too. Among business ratepayers, 62% say they would be unhappy, including 26% very unhappy. Among residential ratepayers, 65% say they would be unhappy, including 42% very unhappy.



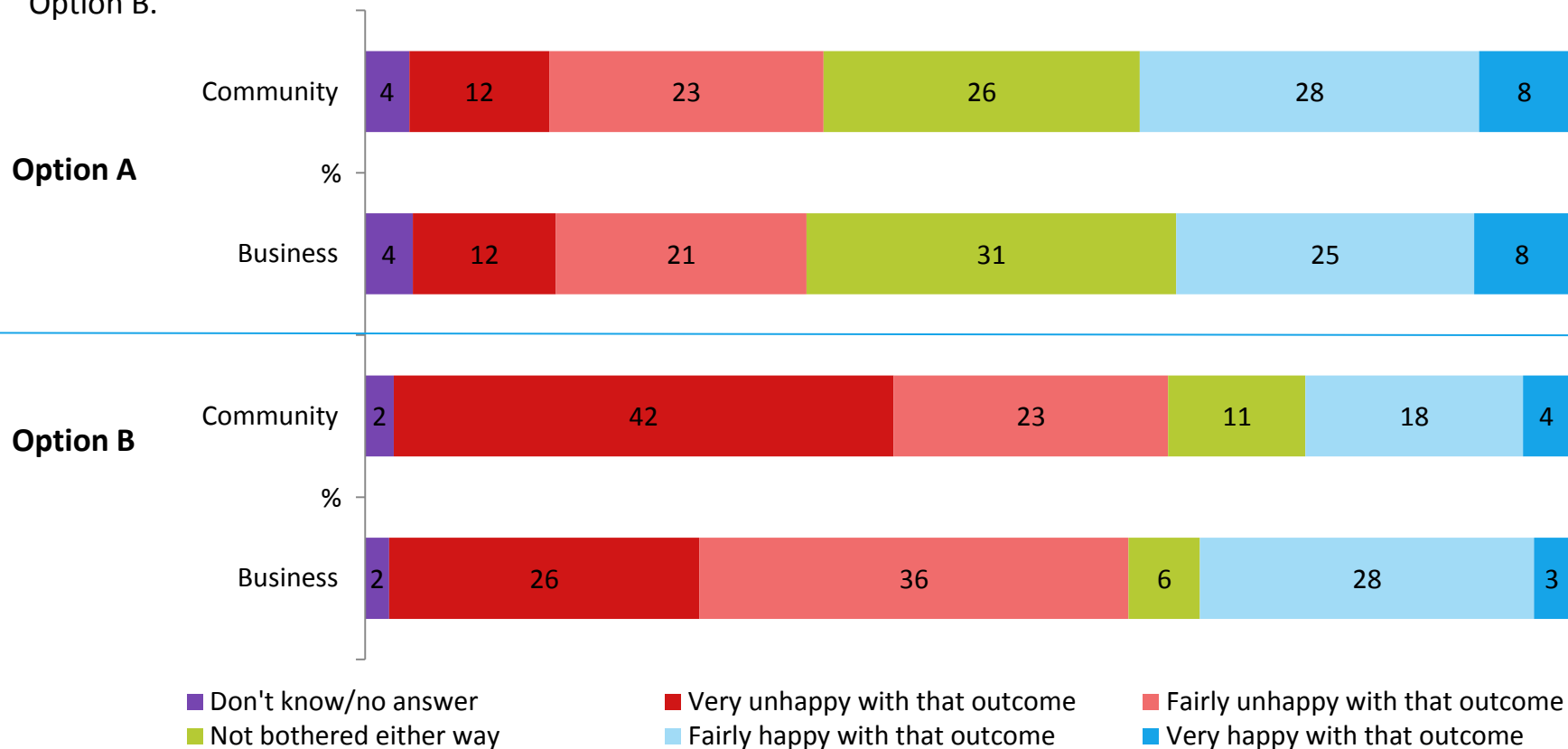
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B (a 9.75% rate increase for each of the next 4 years, including the annual rate peg of around 2.5% per annum, an increase in general rates **[over the 4 years of 35-40% / for businesses over the 4 years of around 53%]**; with Singleton Council continuing to provide the current level and range of services, carry out maintenance and renew assets) how would you react?

**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community and Business

The chart below shows the results for reactions to a decision to choose Option A or Option B among both residential ratepayers and business ratepayers, emphasising the negative reaction to a decision to choose Option B.



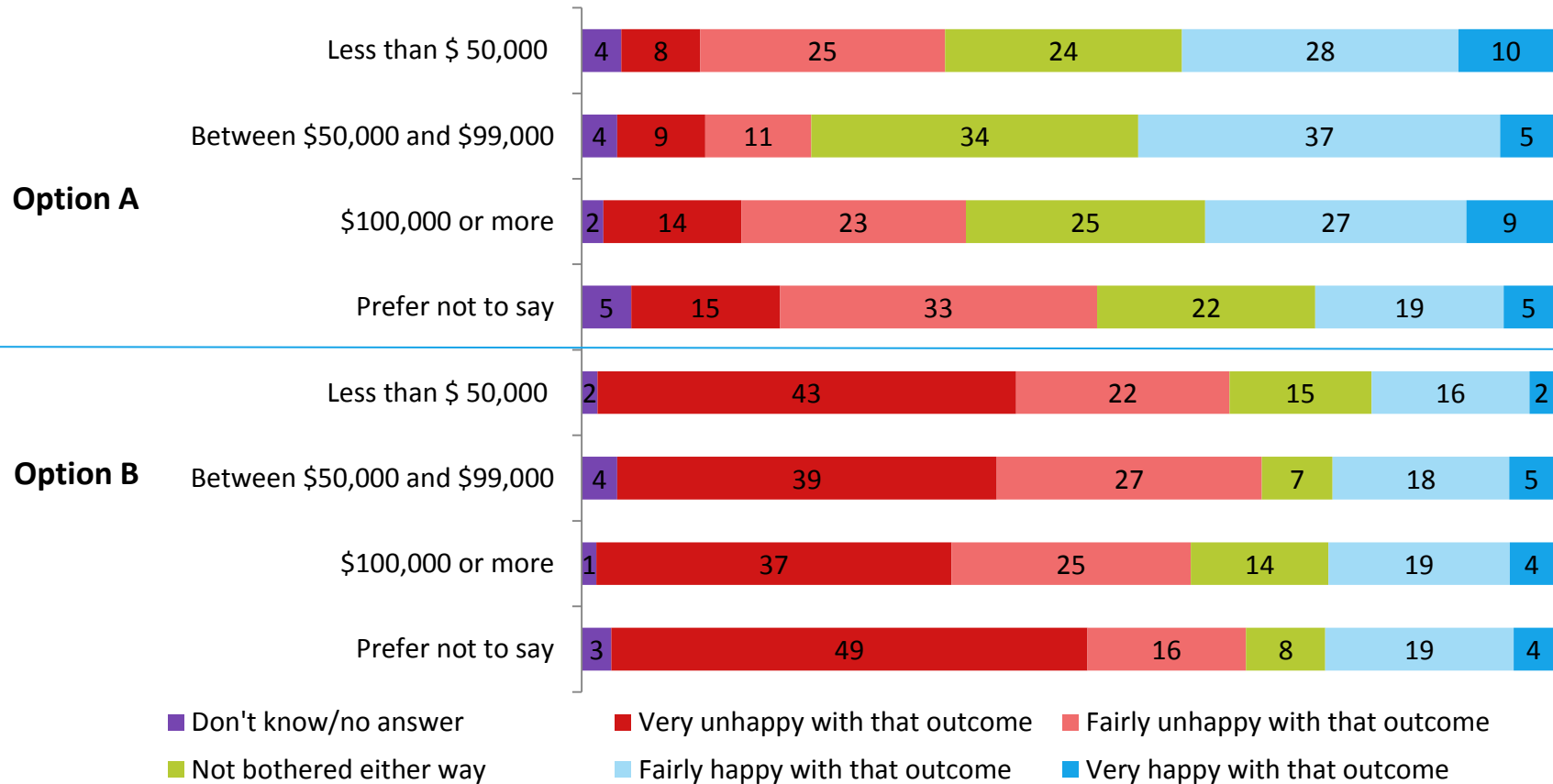
**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?  
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?  
**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.



# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by income

The negative reaction to Singleton Council choosing Option B is apparent across high, medium, and low income groups:



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

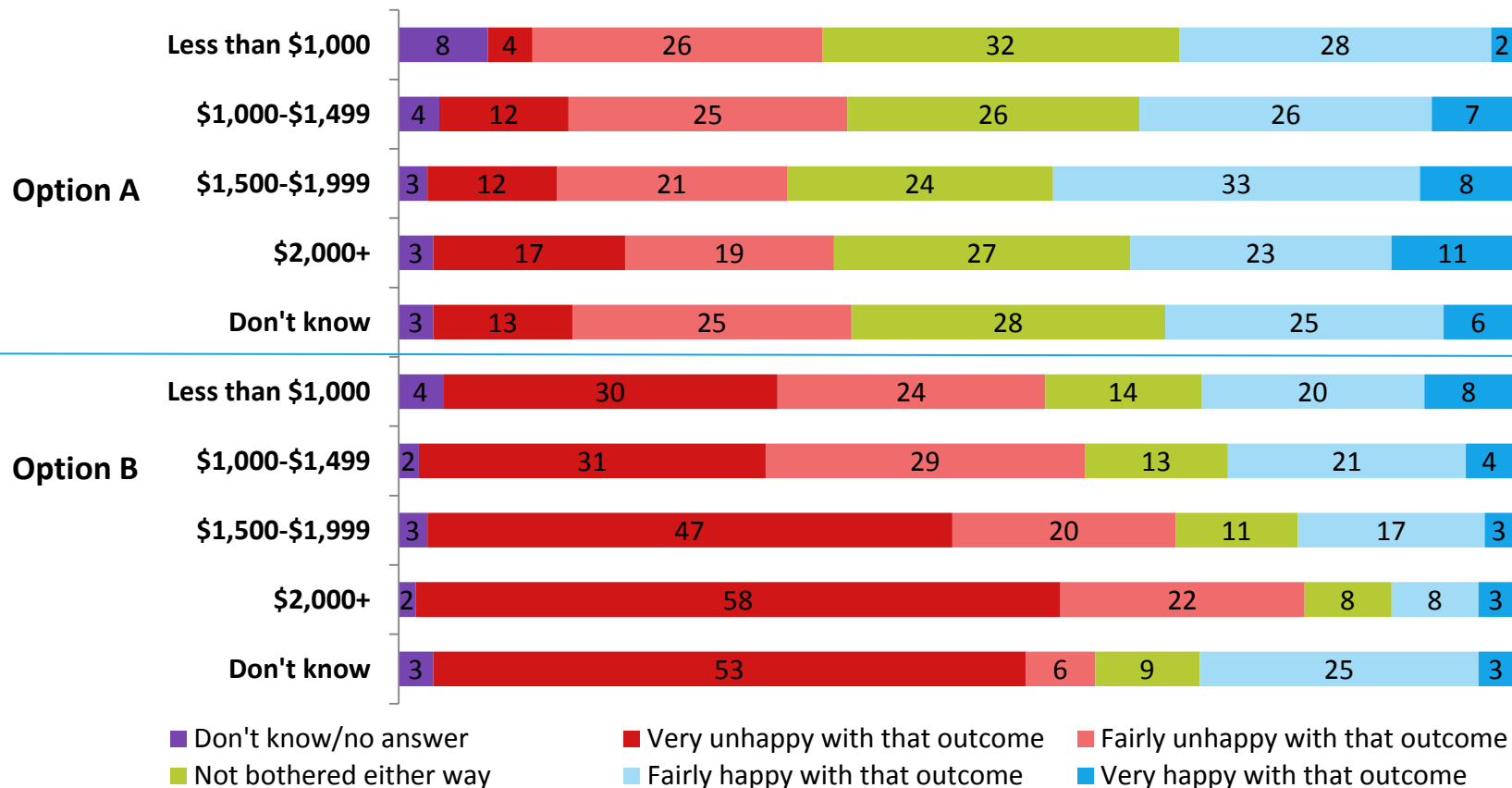
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

**Bases:** Less than \$50K = 123; \$50-99K = 110; \$100K+ = 134; Prefer not to say = 98

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by rates pay

Even among those who pay less than \$1,000 in general rates, there is a negative reaction to Option B being chosen – 54% unhappy. Among those paying \$2,000+, it would be 80% unhappy, including 58% very unhappy.



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

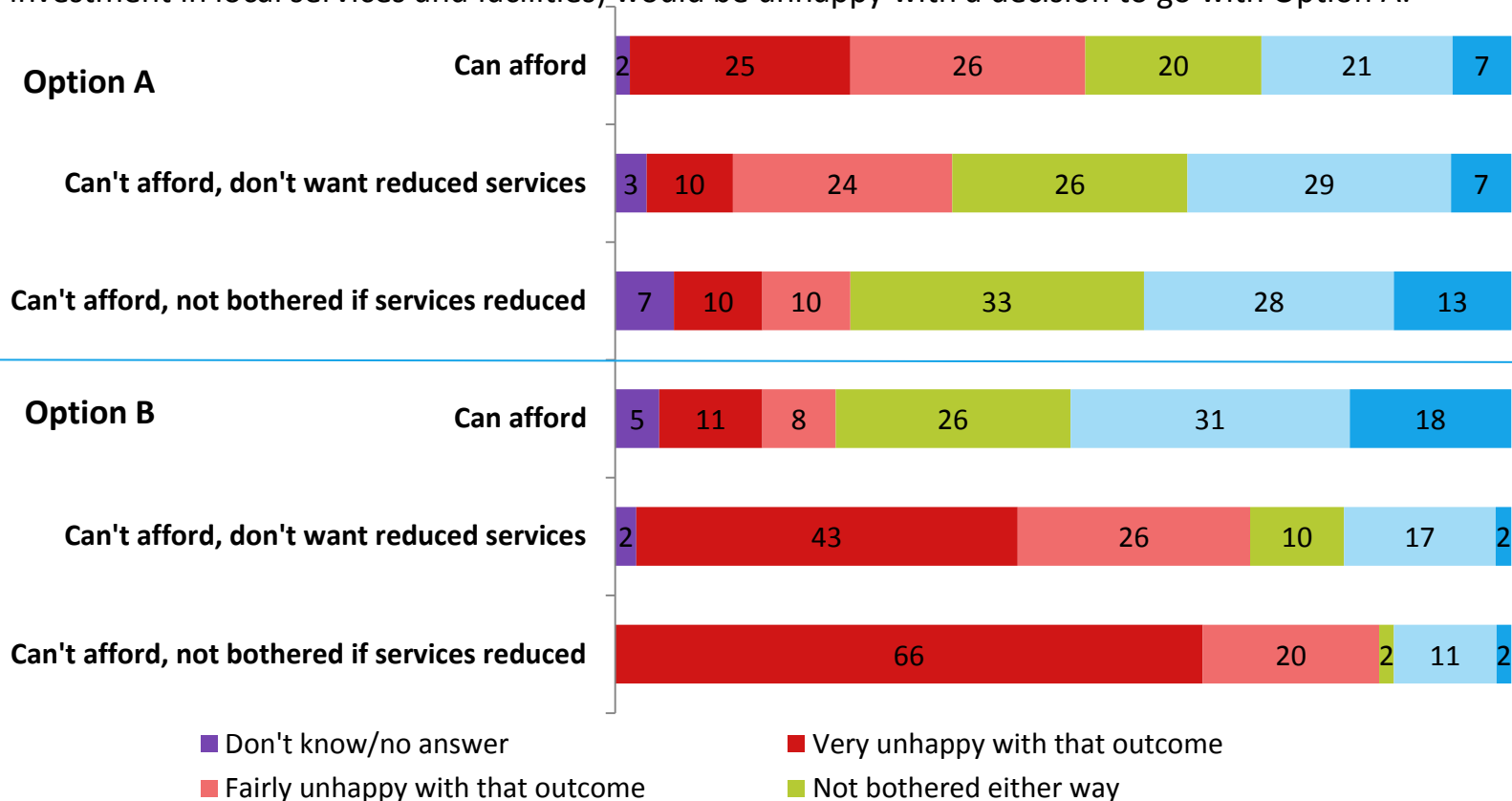
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

**Bases:** Less than \$1,000 = 50; \$1,000-\$1,499 = 164; \$1,500-\$1,999 = 155; \$2,000+ = 64; don't know = 32.

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by can afford

As we would expect, those who say they cannot afford rate increases are especially likely to be unhappy with a decision to choose Option B. Also note, however, that half of those who can afford to pay more (and who want more investment in local services and facilities) would be unhappy with a decision to go with Option A.



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

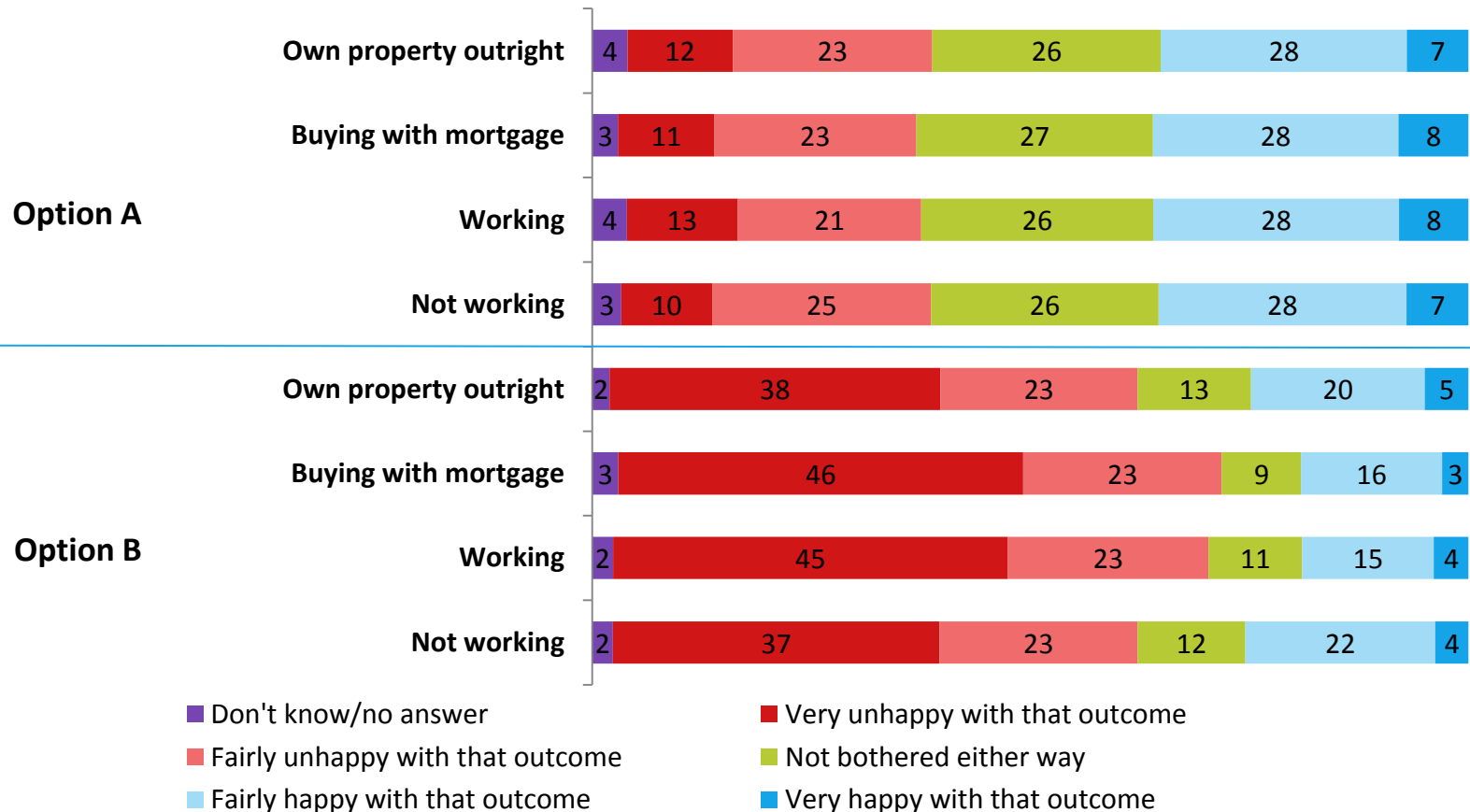
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

**Bases:** Can afford/want more investment = 61; can't afford/don't want reduced service levels = 343; can't afford/not bothered if it means reduced service levels = 61

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by own property outright, working

The responses do not differ significantly by whether own property outright or buying with a mortgage; nor by whether working or not working.



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

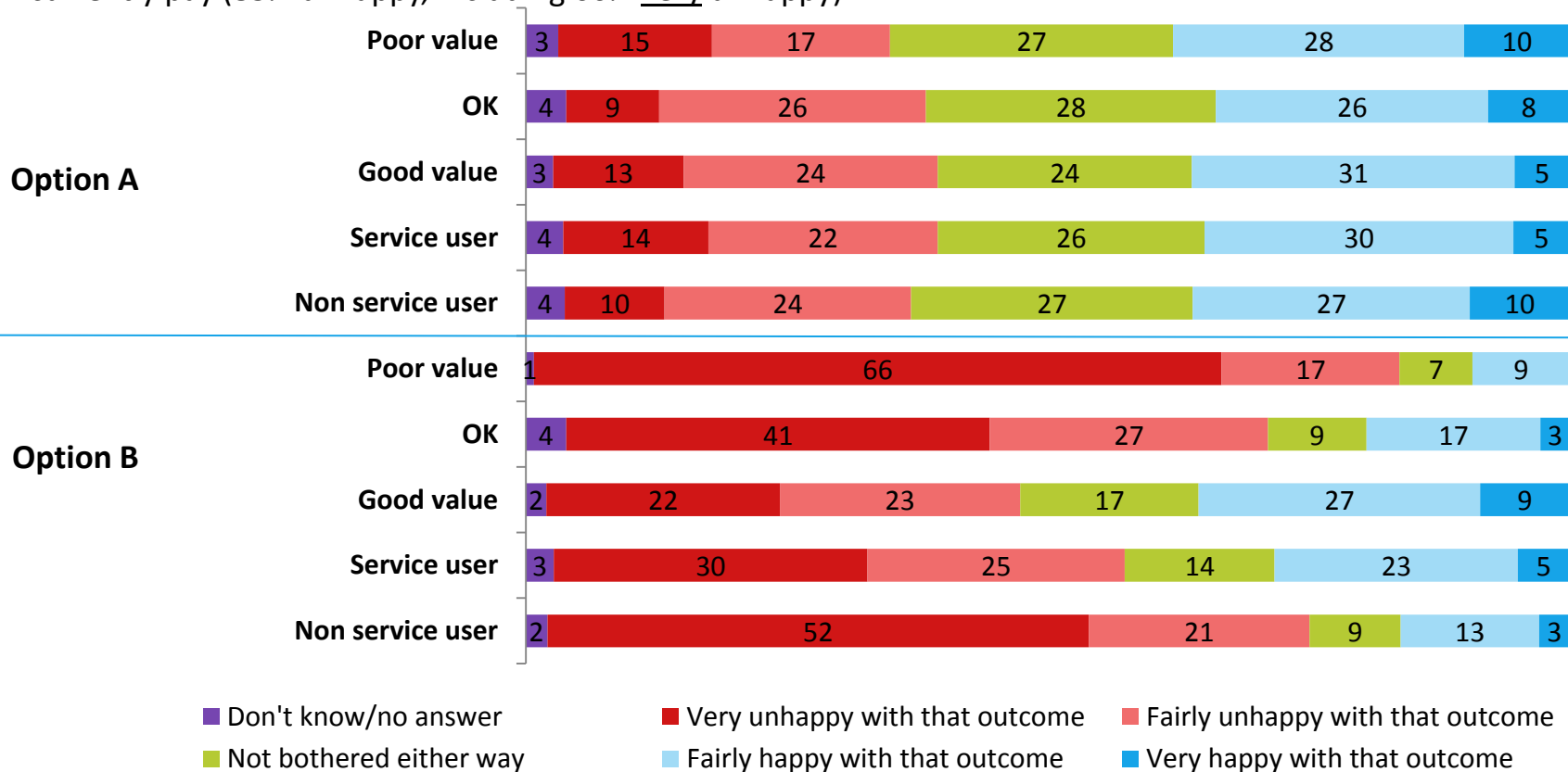
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

**Bases:** Own outright = 260; mortgage = 204; working = 253; not working = 212

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by value rating, service user

Especially likely to react negatively to an Option B decision are those who do not consider themselves service users (73% unhappy, including 52% very unhappy) and those who think they get poor value for what they currently pay (83% unhappy, including 66% very unhappy).



QC4. If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

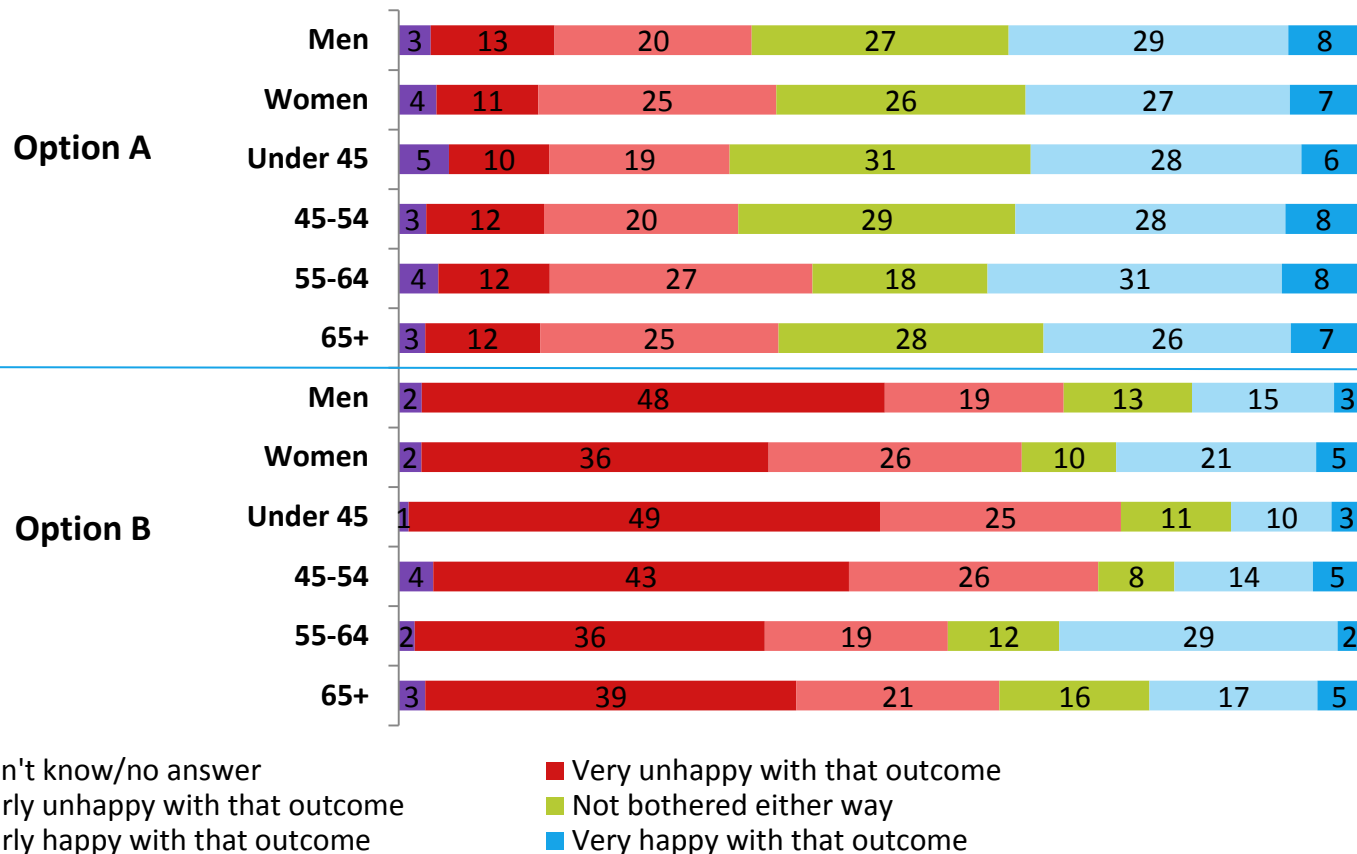
QC5. If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

Bases: Poor value = 129; OK = 180; good value = 152; service user = 223; non-service user = 241

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by gender, age

The patterns are much the same by gender and age, but with those aged under 45 especially likely to react negatively to an Option B decision (74% unhappy, including 49% very unhappy).



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

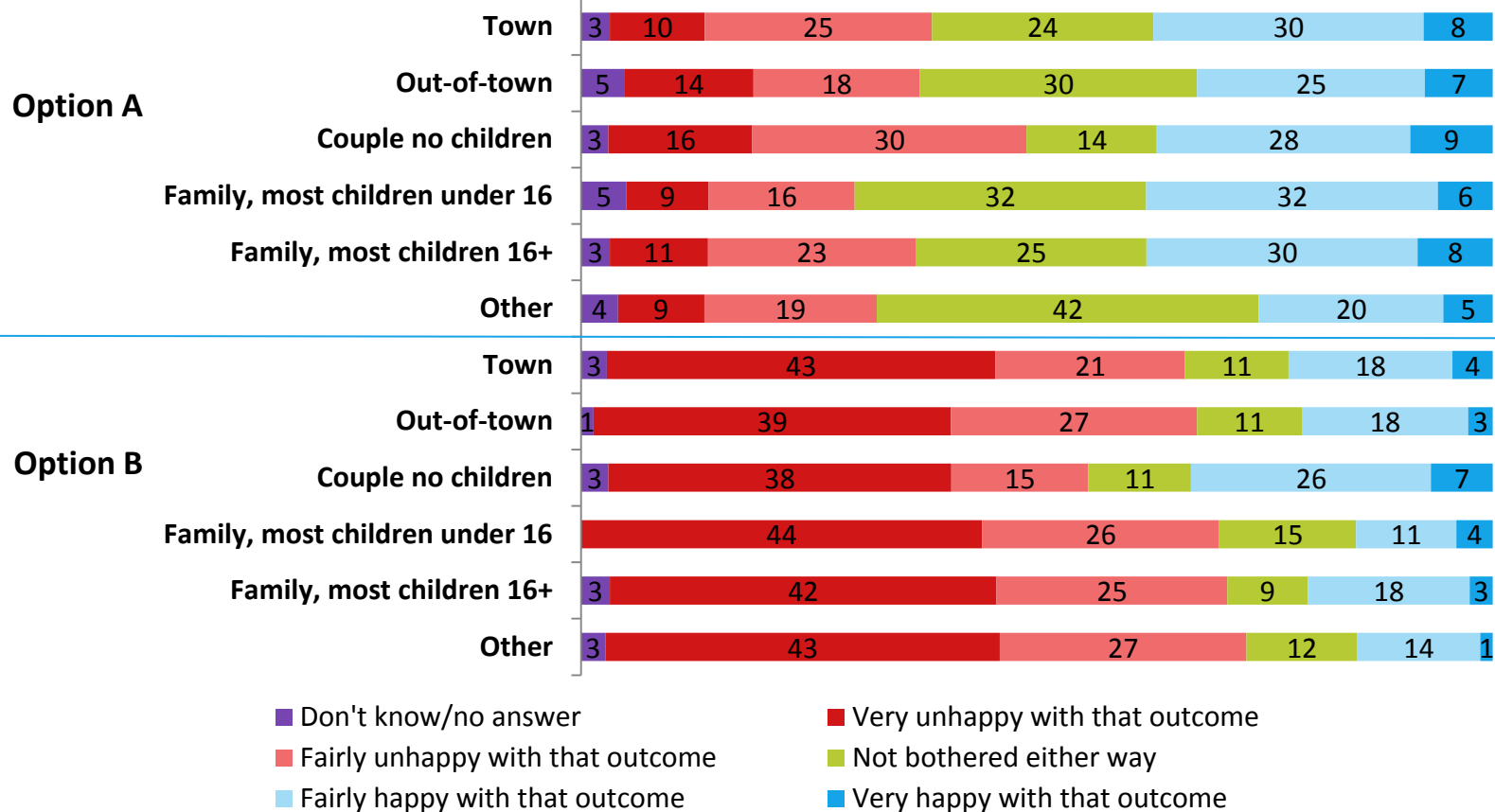
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

**Bases:** Men = 210; women = 255; under 45 = 96; 45-54 = 139; 55-64 = 121; 65+ = 109

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community by location, household composition

There is no significant difference between those living in town and those out-of-town. Couples with no children once again show their relative support for Option B.



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

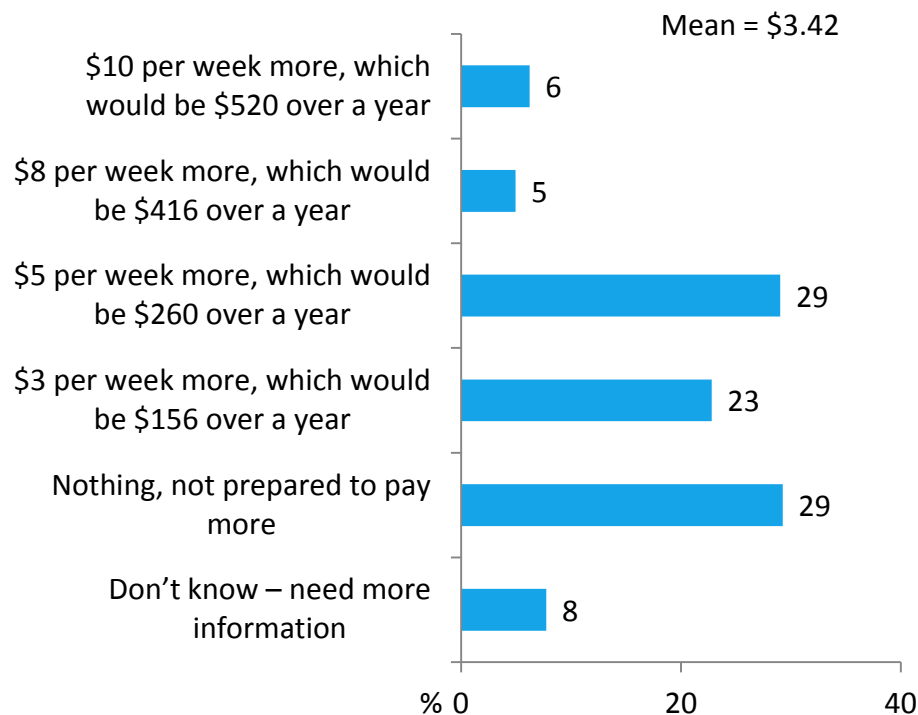
**Bases:** Town = 317; out-of-town = 148; couple, no kids = 133; family, kids under 16 = 100; family, kids 16+ = 158; other = 74

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

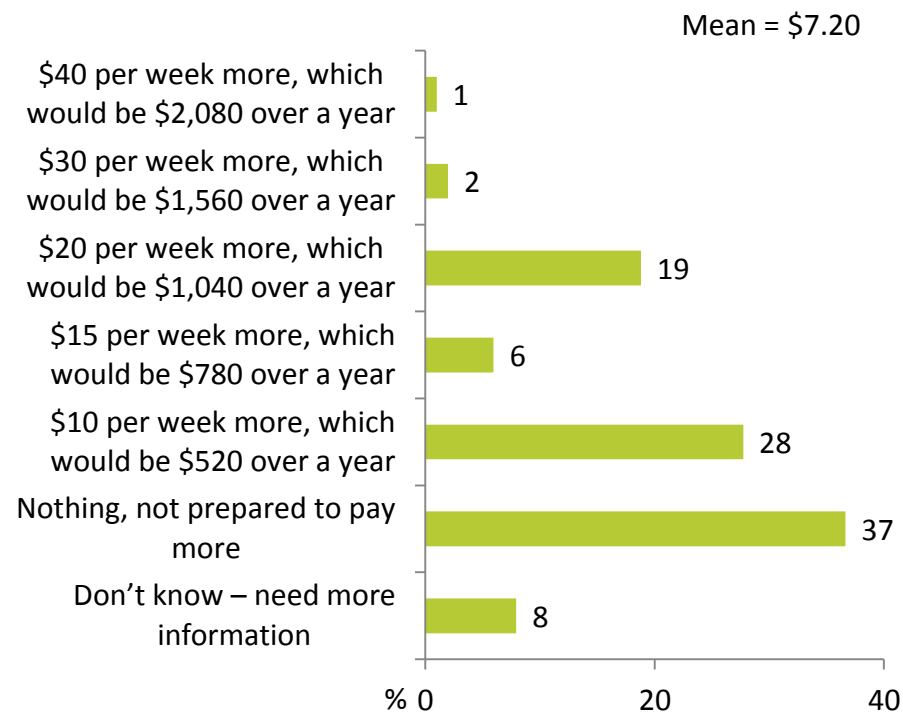
## Community and Business

Many residential ratepayers (29%) and business ratepayers (37%) are not prepared to pay any more to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level. The charts below show the distribution of answers. This translates into a mean amount prepared to pay of \$3.42 per week for residential ratepayers and \$7.20 per week for business ratepayers.

### Community



### Business



**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

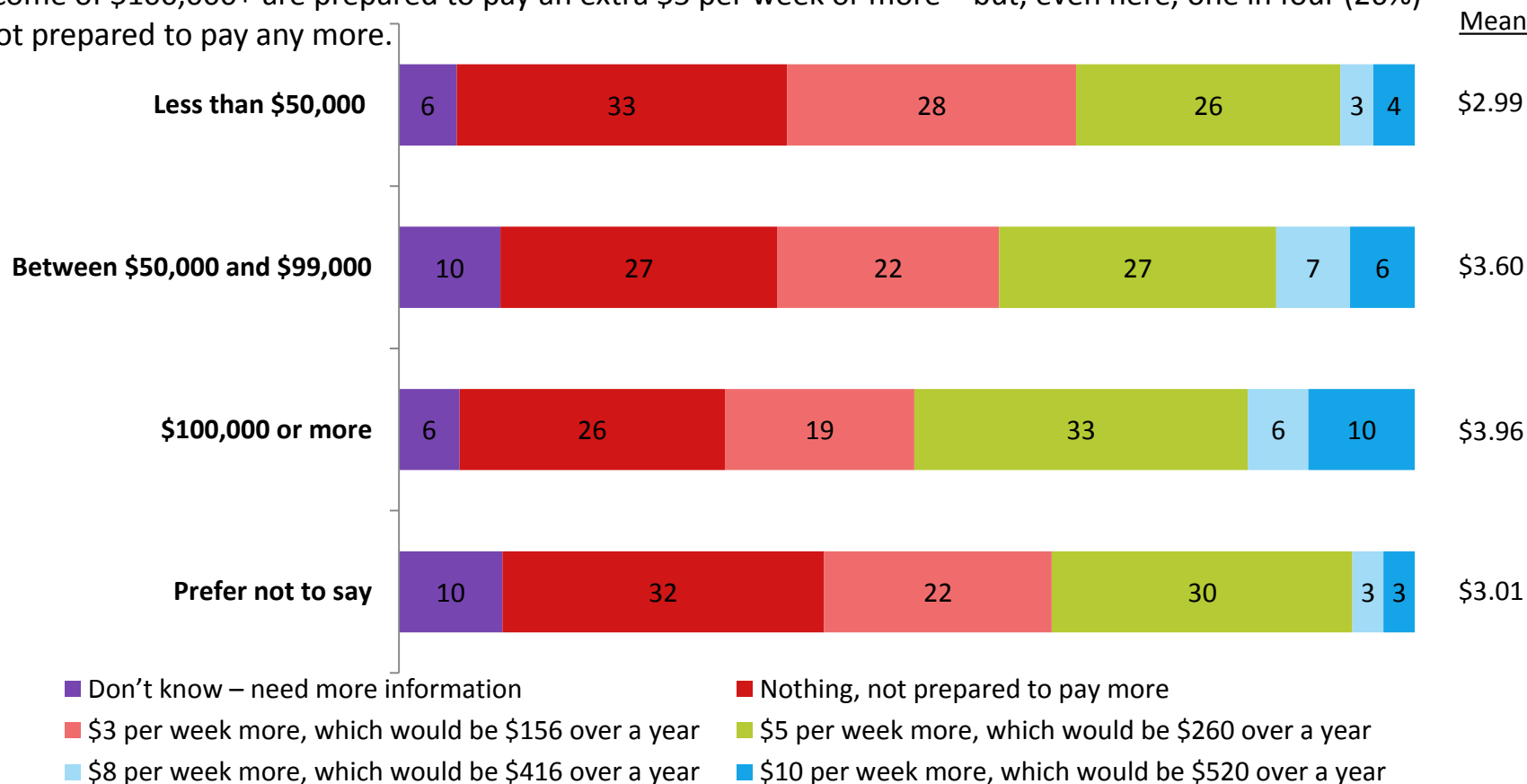
**Base:** Total community sample, n=465; total business sample, n=101.



# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

## Community by income

As we would expect, those on higher incomes are more likely to be prepared to pay more – 49% of those with an income of \$100,000+ are prepared to pay an extra \$5 per week or more – but, even here, one in four (26%) are not prepared to pay any more.



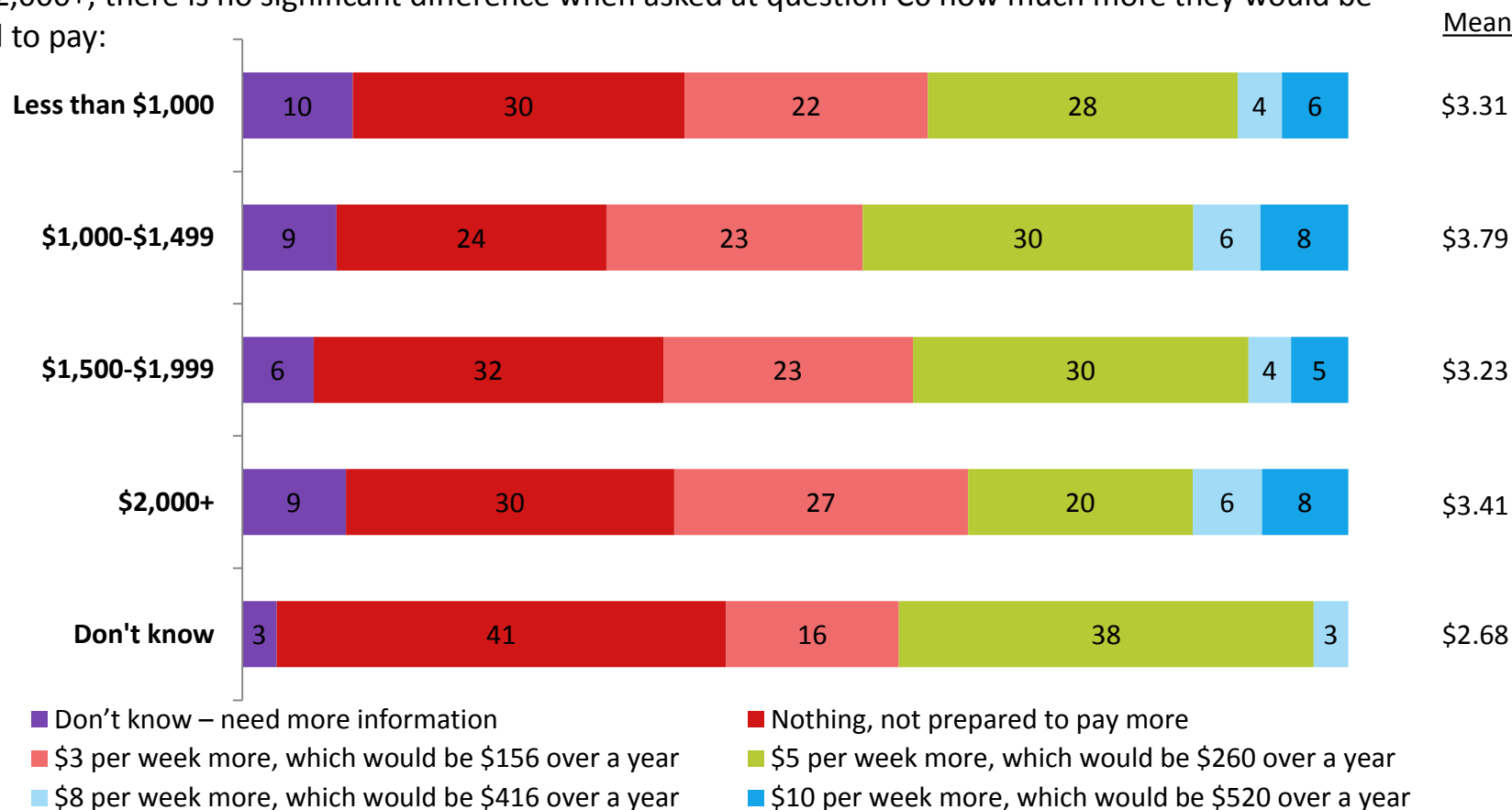
**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Bases:** Less than \$50K = 123; \$50-99K = 110; \$100K+ = 134; Prefer not to say = 98

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

## Community by rates pay

Despite the wide variation in preferences for Options A and B for those paying less than \$1,000 and those paying \$2,000+, there is no significant difference when asked at question C6 how much more they would be prepared to pay:



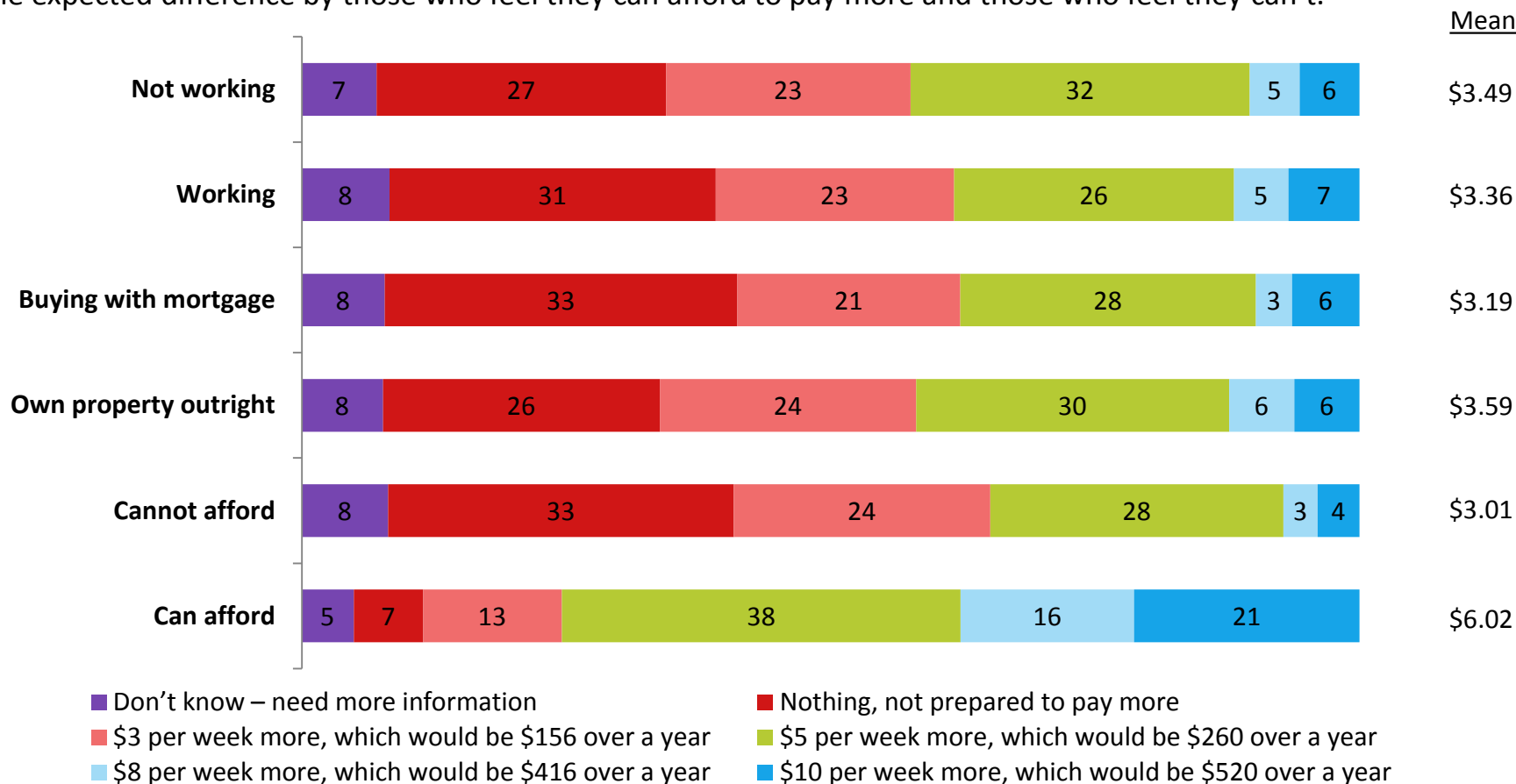
**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Bases:** Less than \$1,000 = 50; \$1,000-\$1,499 = 164; \$1,500-\$1,999 = 155; \$2,000+ = 64; don't know = 32

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

## Community by can afford, own property outright, working

Once again, there is no significant difference by whether working or whether own property outright. And there is the expected difference by those who feel they can afford to pay more and those who feel they can't.



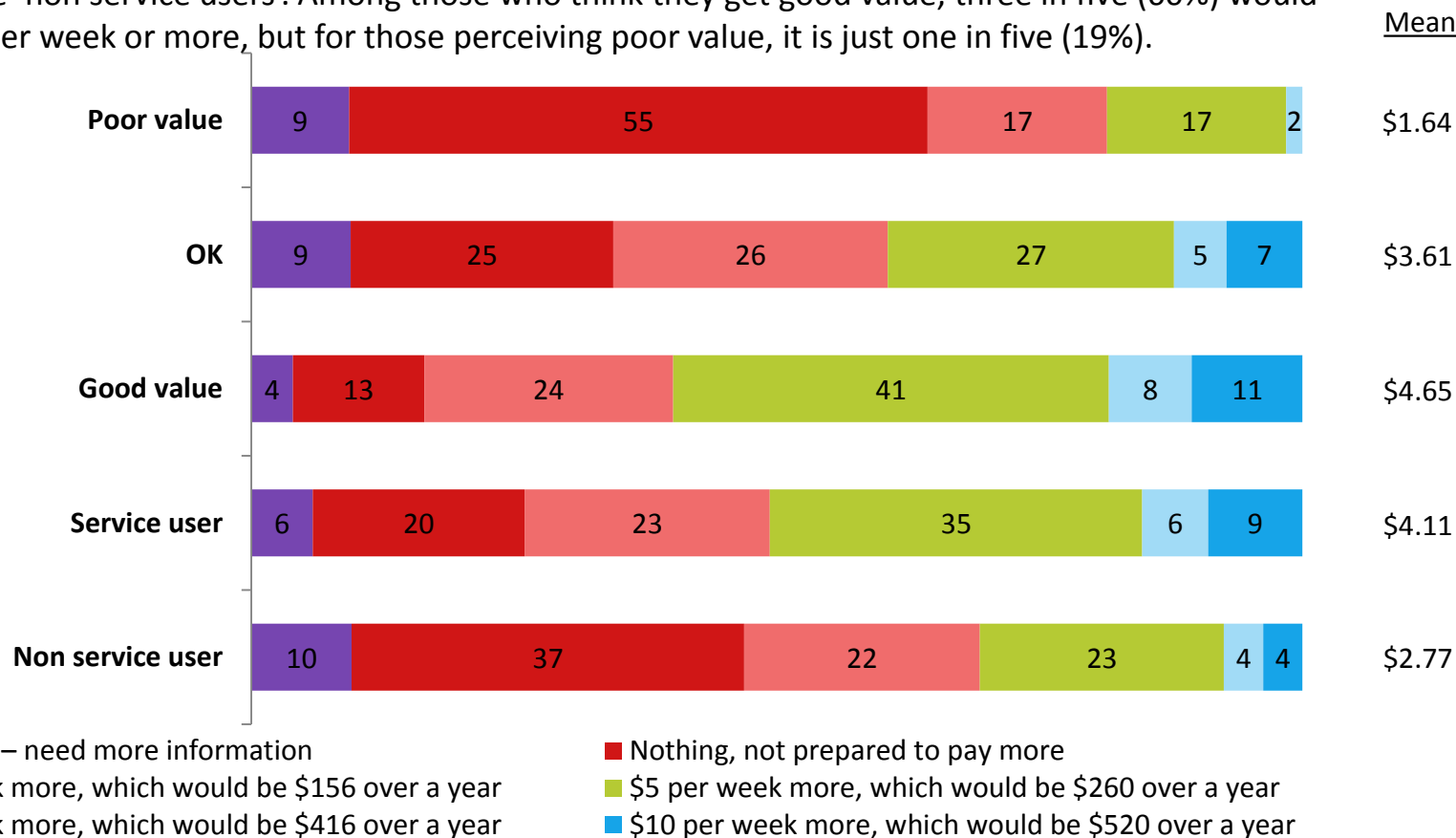
**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Bases:** Can afford = 61; can't afford = 404; own outright = 260; mortgage = 204; working = 253; not working = 212

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

## Community by value rating, service user

Half of the 'service users' (50%) would be prepared to pay a further \$5 per week or more, but fewer than a third (31%) of the 'non service users'. Among those who think they get good value, three in five (60%) would pay an extra \$5 per week or more, but for those perceiving poor value, it is just one in five (19%).



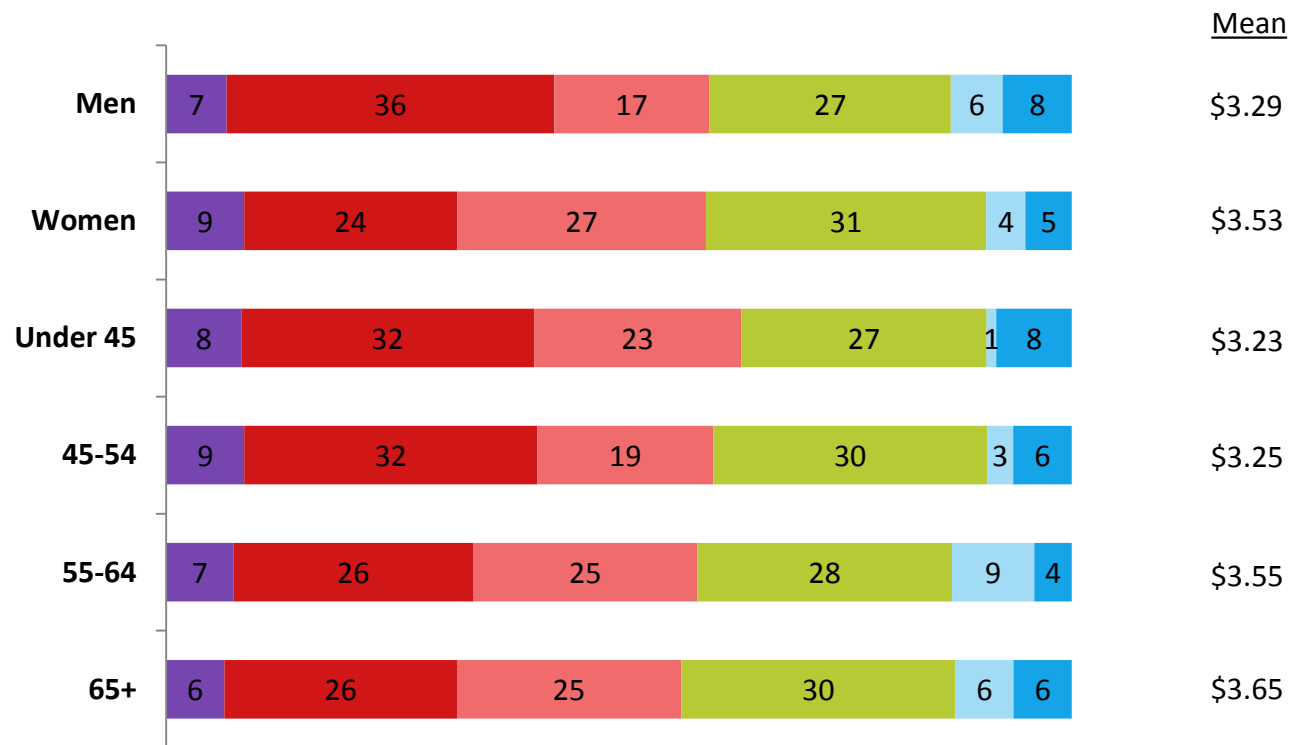
**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Bases:** Poor value = 129; OK = 180; good value = 152; service user = 223; non-service user = 241

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

## Community by gender, age

There are no significant differences by age or gender.



■ Don't know – need more information

■ \$3 per week more, which would be \$156 over a year

■ \$8 per week more, which would be \$416 over a year

■ Nothing, not prepared to pay more

■ \$5 per week more, which would be \$260 over a year

■ \$10 per week more, which would be \$520 over a year

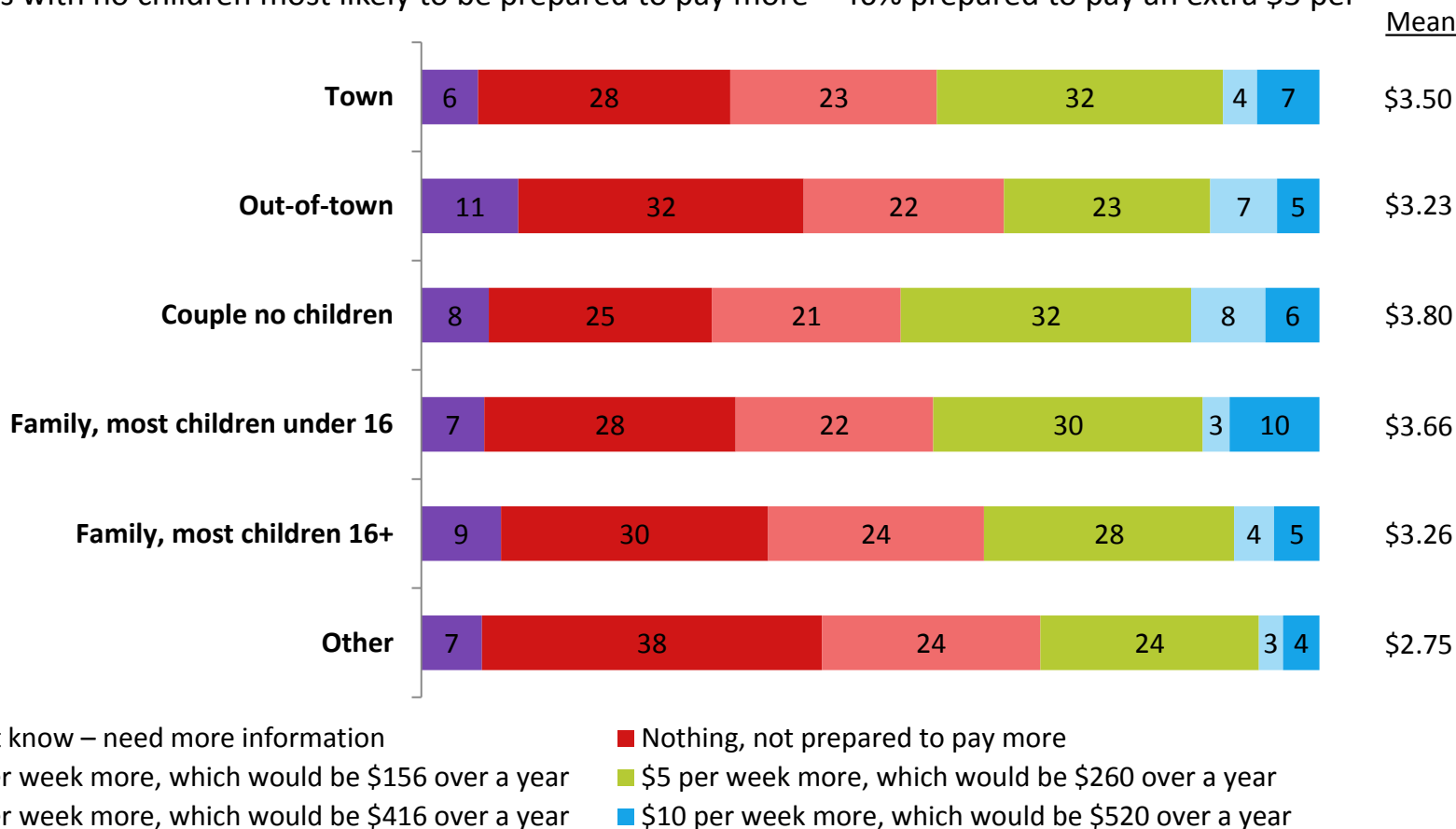
**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Bases:** Men = 210; women = 255; under 45 = 96; 45-54 = 139; 55-64 = 121; 65+ = 109

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

## Community by location, household composition

There are no significant differences by those living in Singleton town and those living out-of-town. Once again, we find couples with no children most likely to be prepared to pay more – 46% prepared to pay an extra \$5 per week or more.



**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Bases:** Town = 317; out-of-town = 148; couple, no kids = 133; family, kids under 16 = 100; family, kids 16+ = 158; other = 74



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# Singleton Council SRV

## Community surveys – telephone v online

15 December 2015

[www.instinctandreason.com](http://www.instinctandreason.com)



# Document information

Prepared for	Singleton Council
Main client contacts	Mark Ihlein, Bruce Devonport
Prepared by	Instinct and Reason
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Date	15 December 2015
Reference #	J2251

# Contents & coverage

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<b>SECTION 6</b>	Scenarios facing Singleton Council

1

Background, objectives & approach

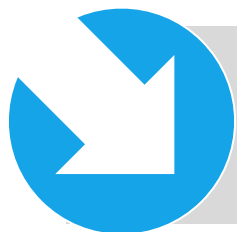
# Background & objectives

- In the context of the NSW Government's latest review, Singleton Council has been deemed 'Fit for the Future'. However, Singleton Council has also calculated that to be able to continue to meet the 7 indicators set out in the review, to renew its assets, and to maintain services at their current level, it would need a rate increase for the next 4 years of 9.75% per annum. This would require a Special Rate Variation (SRV) and approval from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).
- There are effectively two possible scenarios. One is a successful submission to IPART with approval for the SRV of 9.75% per annum for the next 4 years to be able to renew assets and maintain service levels. The alternative is a rate peg only increase of around 2.5% per annum for the next 4 years, which would not provide sufficient funds for asset renewal and would have adverse impacts on services. Council's preference therefore would be for the SRV.
- Singleton Council wanted to undertake a program of research, communications and community engagement to assess the potential impact of these two possible courses of action; and assess community views. Along with its own internal analysis, and an externally commissioned analysis of capacity to pay (undertaken by the Western Research Institute in Bathurst), Instinct and Reason was commissioned to undertake community research.
- This research was designed to obtain reliable, robust indicators of the views of residential ratepayers and business ratepayers; to obtain these views in light of a reasonable degree of, and balanced provision of, relevant information; to gain insight into, and understanding of, the community's perspective; to assist Singleton Council in undertaking an appropriate process of research and community engagement; and to guide the decision-making process.

# Methodology

research among ratepayers: telephone and online

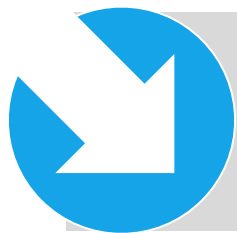
**There was a cross-sectional survey of ratepayers carried out by telephone and an online survey open to other ratepayers via the website (and follow-up qualitative research). This report compares the online survey and telephone survey results.**



A survey questionnaire was designed around the core issue of the two scenarios for rate increases and asset renewal/service levels, with other necessary questions for context and analysis. The options were carefully summarised and suitable questions devised. The survey was tested and piloted, and timed at around 12-13 minutes as a telephone interview.



A telephone survey was carried out among residential ratepayers (n=465) and business ratepayers (n=101) between 1-11 November 2015. Households were randomly selected and the ratepayer/head of household interviewed. Businesses were randomly called and interviews undertaken with the owner-proprietor (in most cases) or an appropriate director/senior manager. In each case, a good cross-section of ratepayers were surveyed.



In addition to the tightly controlled cross-sectional survey carried out by telephone, an online version of the survey was set up to provide an opportunity for other ratepayers to comment via the website, following comprehensive information being provided by Singleton Council. 115 residential ratepayers completed the online survey between 10-30 November 2015.



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## Executive summary

# Executive summary

## Online survey respondents much more likely to favour Option A and be unhappy with Option B

- ■ Among the residential ratepayers completing the online survey, nine in ten (91%) would prefer Singleton Council to choose the rate peg only increase Option A, compared with two in three of the residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey (65%).
- ■ A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) would be happy if Singleton Council chose Option A, compared with just one in three (36%) in the telephone survey.
- ■ Almost nine in ten of those completing the online survey (87%) would be unhappy if Singleton Council chose Option B, with its 9.75% pa increase over 4 years, with almost two in three (64%) very unhappy. In each case, the figures are much higher than for residential ratepayers in the telephone survey, which were already high (65% unhappy, 42% very unhappy).

# Executive summary

## Online survey respondents much less likely to be prepared to pay more, or able to pay more

- ■ A majority of those completing the online survey (56%) are not prepared to pay anything more in rates '*to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level*'. This is almost twice as high as in the telephone survey (29%).
- ■ The mean amount extra prepared to pay each week is also much lower - \$2.23 per week for the online survey respondents, compared with \$3.42 per week for the telephone survey respondents.
- ■ A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) position themselves as '*not prepared to pay more in rates, even if it means reduced service levels*', more than double the number taking this position in the telephone survey (22%).
- ■ Two in five of those completing the online survey (43%) position themselves as '*I can't afford to pay more, and I'm not bothered if it means reduced service levels*', more than three times the number taking this position in the telephone survey (13%).



# Executive summary

## Context: Online survey respondents are...

- ■ Less likely to use or perceive benefit from Singleton Council services and facilities – 33% answering ‘*a lot*’ or ‘*quite a few*’ compared with 48% in the telephone survey.
- ■ Less likely to perceive value from what they currently pay in rates – 47% answering ‘*poor value*’, compared with 27% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to think the rates are high – 71% do, much higher than the 53% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to reject the suggestion that Singleton has historically had low rate increases – 67% answer ‘*no*’, compared with 31% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to reject the suggestion that Singleton has historically had low rates compared with neighbouring councils – 57% answer ‘*no*’, compared with 31% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to think of Singleton Council as ‘*wasteful and inefficient*’ – 70% answer ‘*yes*’, compared with 43% in the telephone survey.

# Executive summary

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## Profile: Online survey respondents are...

- More likely to be aged under 45 – 66% are, compared with 21% in the telephone survey.
- More likely to have children living at home – 61% have, compared with 36% in the telephone survey.
- More likely to be employed full-time – 49% are, compared with 29% in the telephone survey.
- More likely to have a mortgage – 79% have, compared with 56% in the telephone survey.
- More likely to live out-of-town – 51% do, compared with 32% in the telephone survey.
- More likely to answer '*I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not*' – 26% give this answer, compared with 11% in the telephone survey.



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## Sample profiles

# Sample profile – Residents

## gender, age, household composition

Gender	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Man	210	45	48	42
Woman	255	55	67	58

Age	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Under 45	96	21	76	66
45-54	139	30	21	18
55-64	121	26	11	10
65+	109	23	7	6

Those completing the online survey are particularly likely to be aged under 45 and to have children aged under 16

Household situation	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Single under 30 years	1	*	2	2
Single 30 years and over	54	12	5	4
Share accommodation	3	1	0	0
Couple without children	133	29	23	20
Family with most children under 16 years	100	22	58	50
Family with most children 16 years and over	158	34	22	19
Other	16	3	5	4

Children living at home	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Yes, aged under 6	33	7	35	30
Yes, aged 6-10	32	7	24	21
Yes, aged 11-15	37	8	27	24
Yes, aged 16-18	67	14	11	10
No	296	64	45	39

# Sample profile - Residents

## employment/main activity and internet access

Those completing the online survey are particularly likely to be employed full-time.

Employment/main activity	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100</b>
Employed full-time	137	29	56	49
Employed part-time/flexible hours	79	17	25	22
Self-employed	37	8	15	13
Unemployed and seeking work	11	2	2	2
Unemployed and not seeking work	6	1	0	0
Unable to work due to ill-health or disability, or being a carer for someone with ill health or a disability	10	2	1	1
Retired (self-funded or eligible pensioner)	150	32	5	4
Looking after the home full-time	30	6	6	5
Student on full-time course	0	0	0	0
Other	5	1	4	4

# Sample profile - Residents

## home location, housing tenure, and income

Home location	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %	Annual household income before tax	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Singleton town	317	68	56	49	Less than \$25,000	55	12	3	3
Out-of-town	148	32	59	51	Between \$25,000 and \$49,000	68	15	13	11
					Between \$50,000 and \$74,000	58	12	6	5
					Between \$75,000 and \$99,000	52	11	19	17
					Between \$100,000 and \$149,000	83	18	23	20
					Between \$150,000 and \$199,000	43	9	6	5
					\$200,000 or more	8	2	4	3
					Prefer not to say	98	21	41	36

Housing tenure	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
I live in a house that I own outright	256	55	22	19
I live in a house I'm buying with a mortgage	201	43	87	76
I live in a unit that I own outright	4	1	0	0
I live in a unit I'm buying with a mortgage	3	1	4	3
Other	1	*	2	2

Those completing the online survey are particularly likely to have a mortgage and to be living outside of the town of Singleton



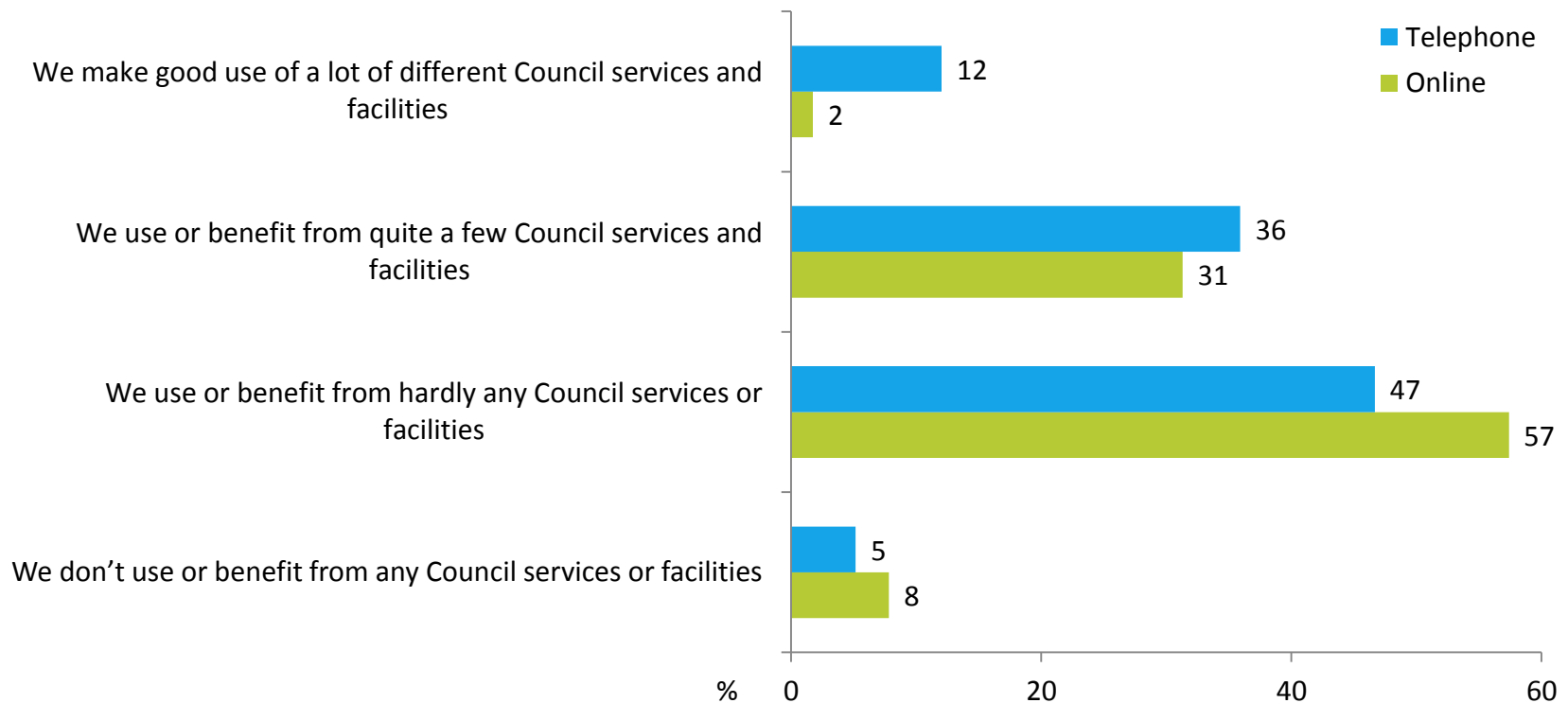
4

## Singleton Council services and communications

# Use of Council services and facilities

## Community

Those who responded to the online survey were less likely to consider themselves to use or benefit from Council services and facilities. The proportion answering 'don't use any' or 'hardly any' is 65%, compared with 52% for the telephone survey respondents.



**QA1.** Which of these statements best describes your household?

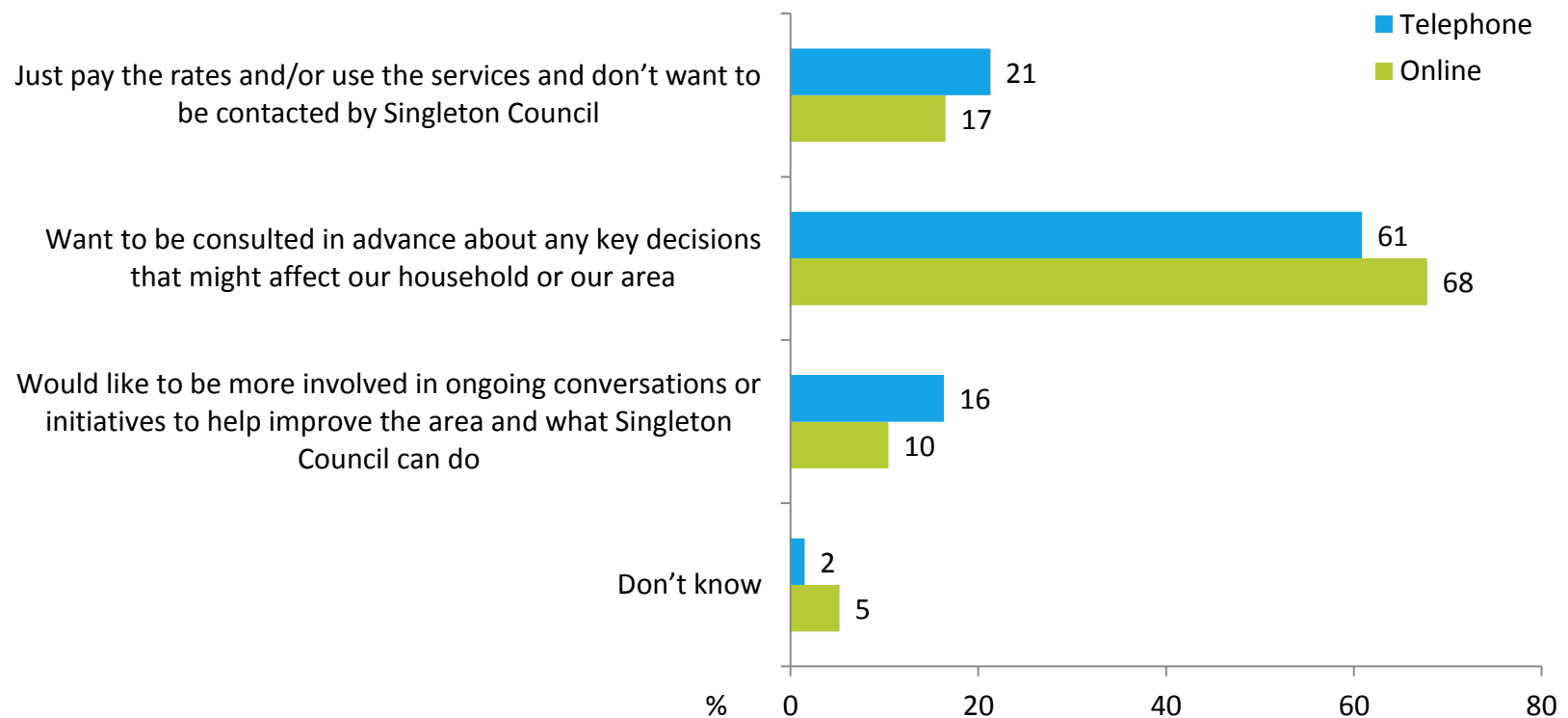
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



# Preferred relationship with Singleton Council

## Community

A majority of both the telephone survey respondents (61%) and the online survey respondents (68%) want to be consulted about key decisions that might affect their household or their area.



**QA2.** Which best describes your own situation in terms of your preferred relationship with Singleton Council?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



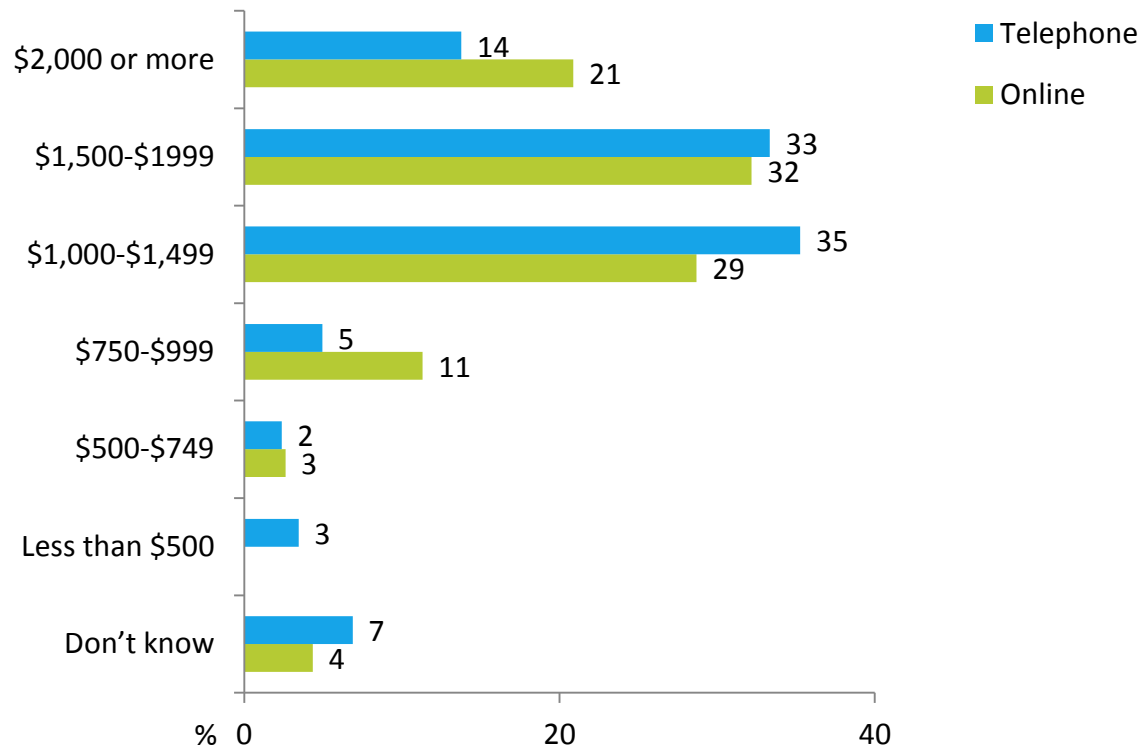
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Levels of rates and services

# Current rates paid to Singleton Council

## Community

There is no significant difference between the residential ratepayers surveyed by telephone and those surveyed online by current amount they (say they) pay in general rates.



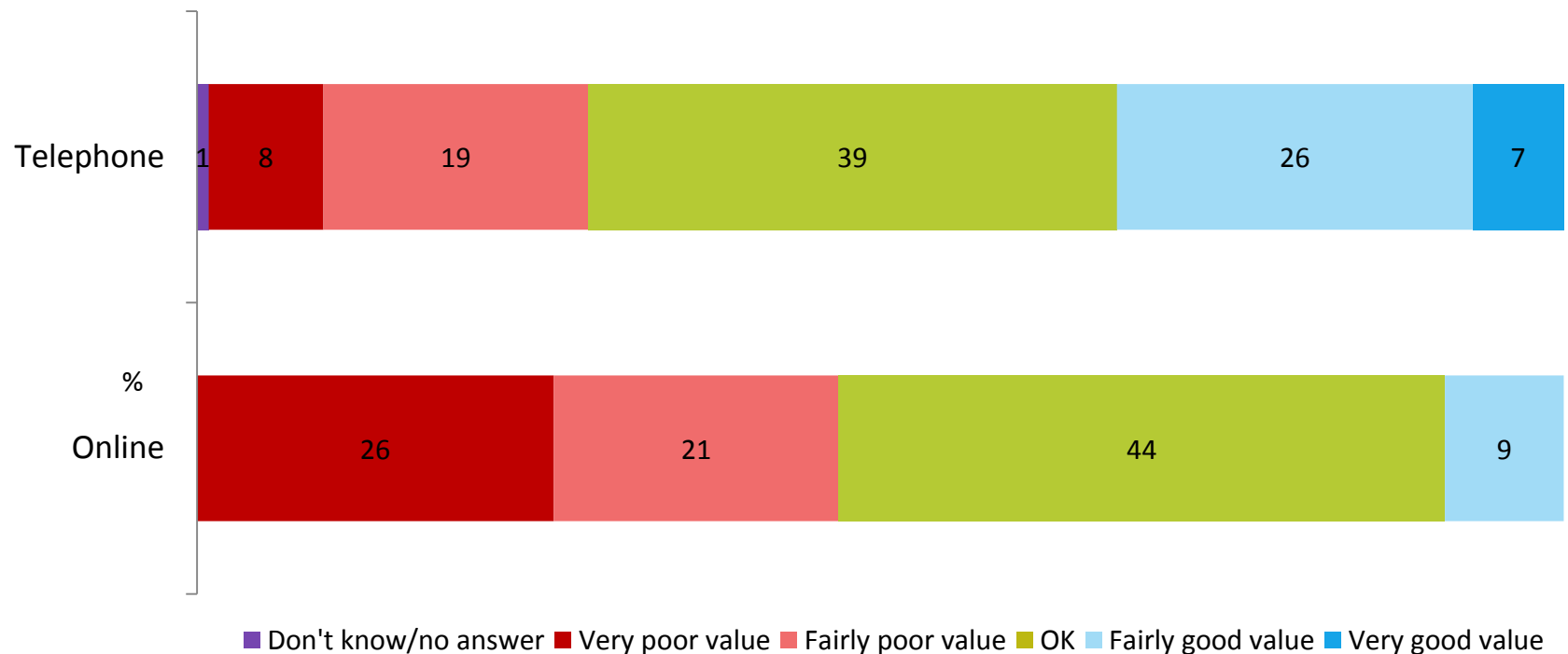
**QB2.** How much does your household currently pay in general rates each year to Singleton Council? By 'general rates', we mean excluding water and sewerage charges.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Value rating of Council services and facilities

## Community

Those completing the online survey are more likely to take the view that the services and facilities provided by Singleton Council are poor value given what they pay in rates. In the telephone survey, it was 33% good and 27% poor. In the online survey, it is just 9% good and 47% poor.



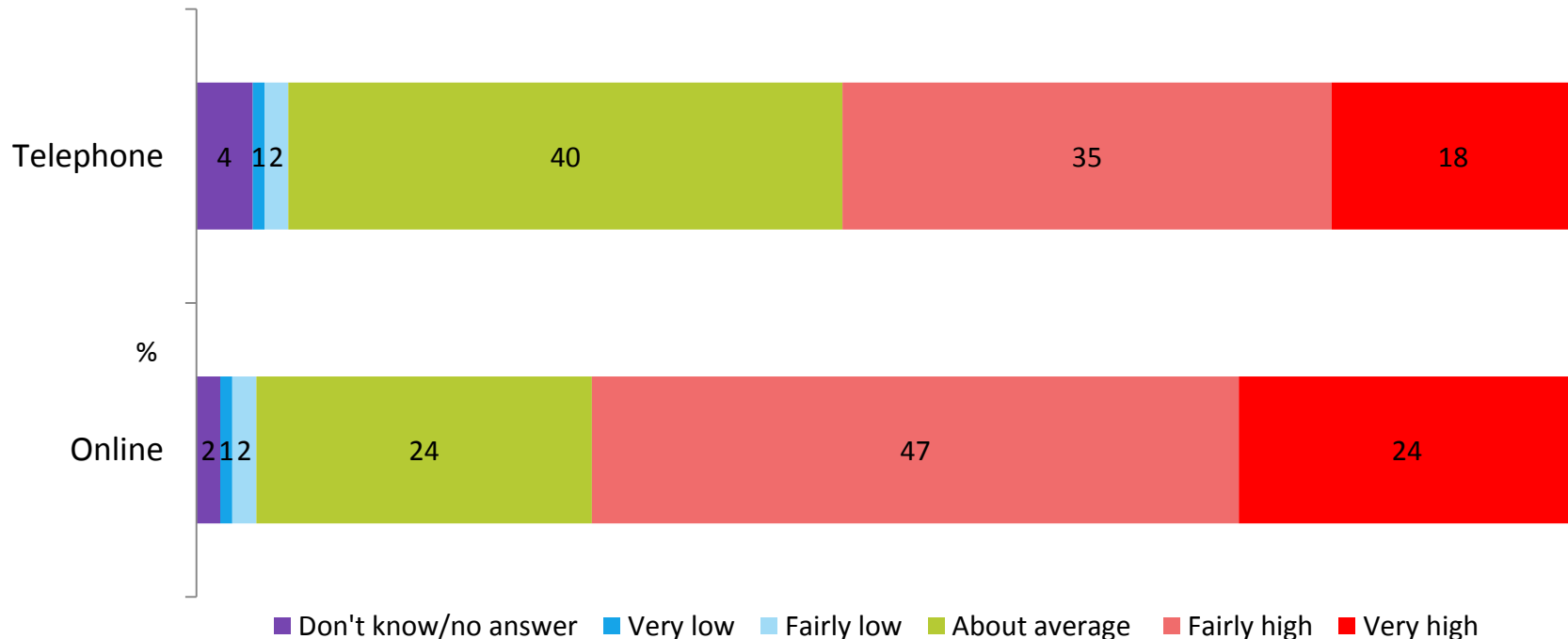
**QB3.** How would you rate the services and facilities provided by Singleton Council given what you pay in rates?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Singleton Council rates high, average or low?

## Community

Those completing the online survey are more likely to take the view that the Council rates in Singleton are high. It was already a majority (53%) in the telephone survey. It is much higher in the online survey, with seven in ten (71%) believing the rates to be high.



**QB1.** Based on the knowledge you have or overall impression you have, are the Council rates in Singleton high, low or average? Would you say...?

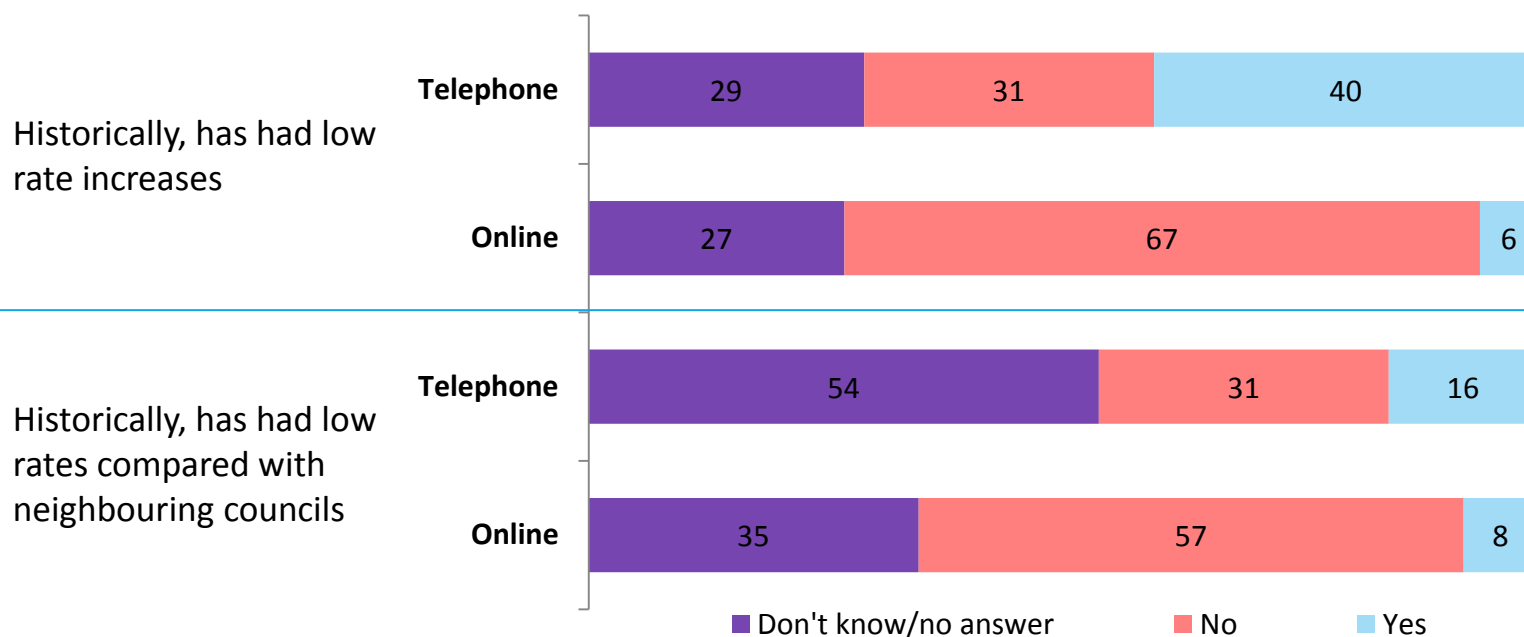
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Perception of historic level of rates/rate rises

## Community

In the telephone survey, there were mixed views on whether Singleton has historically had low rate increases – 40% say yes, 31% no, 29% don't know. In the online survey, the results are more clear cut – 67% say no.

Asked about whether Singleton has had historically low rates compared with neighbouring councils, the online respondents are again more likely to say no – 57% do so, compared with 31% in the telephone survey.



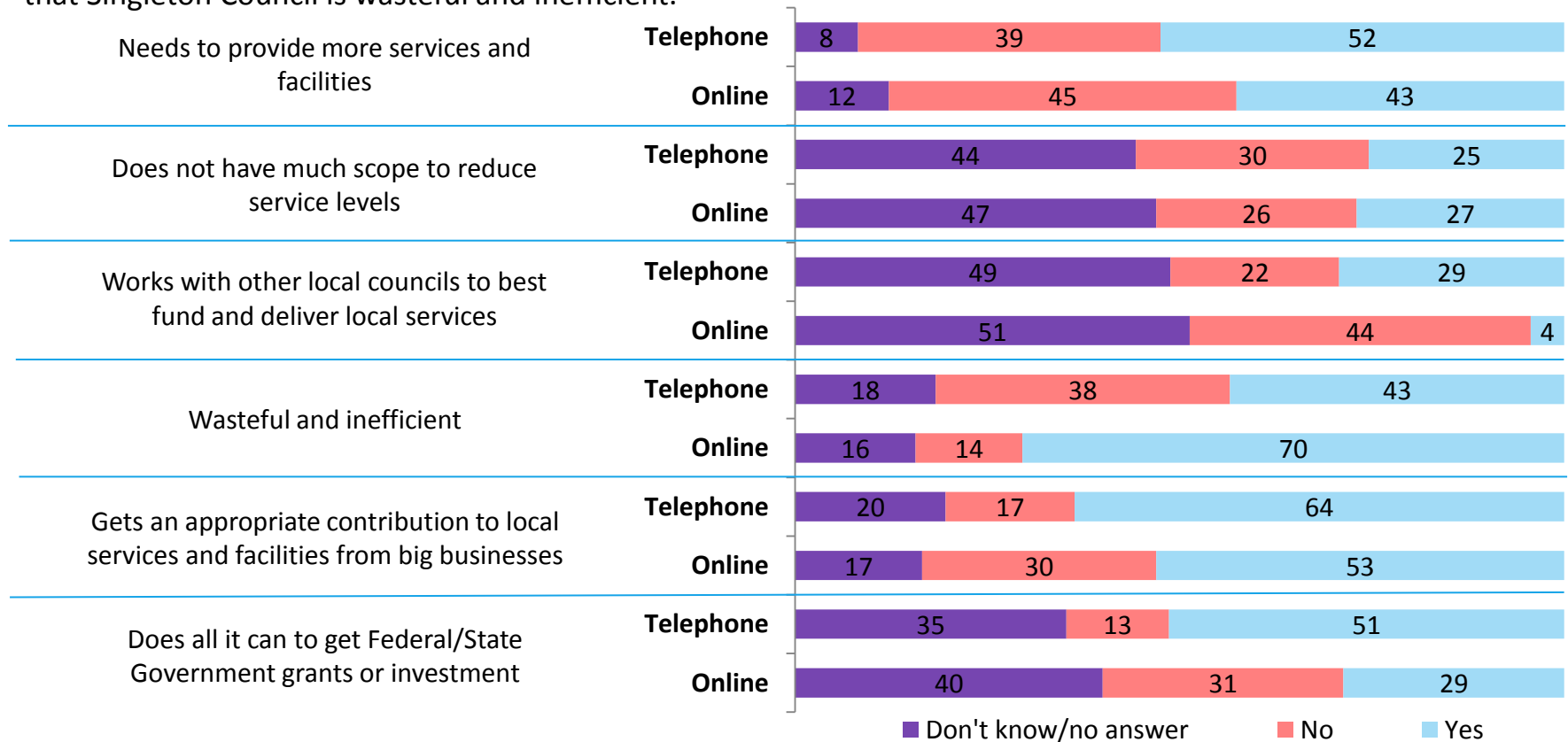
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Other perceptions of Singleton Council

## Community

In the report on the telephone survey results, it was highlighted that it is difficult to make a case for increased rates to ratepayers who have a perception of waste or inefficiency.; and that 43% of residential ratepayers surveyed by telephone took this view. Among those completing the online survey, seven in ten (70%) think that Singleton Council is wasteful and inefficient.



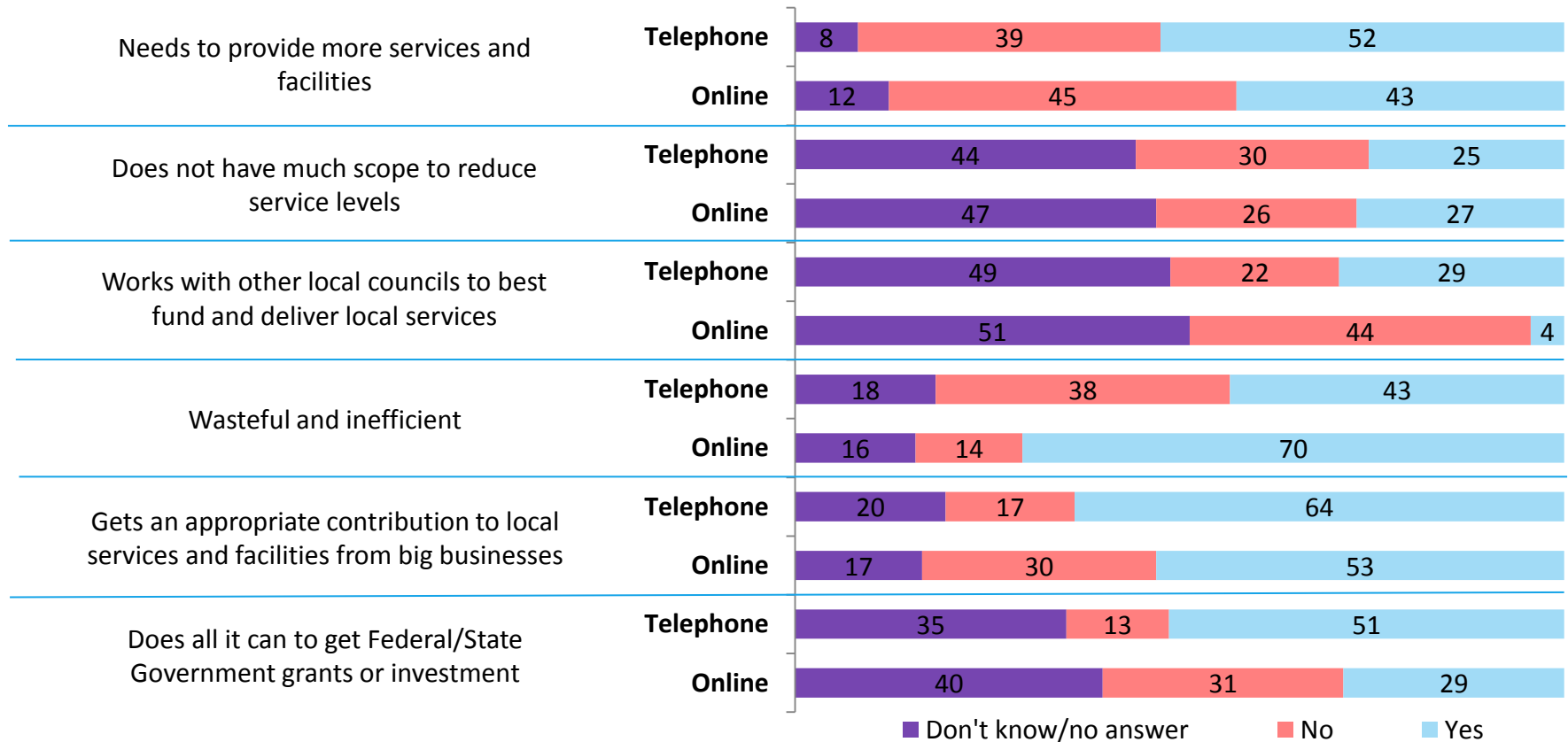
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Other perceptions of Singleton Council (cont'd)

## Community

Those taking part in the online survey also have more negative views with regard to shared services initiatives , maximising Federal/State grants or investments, and getting an appropriate contribution from big businesses.



**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

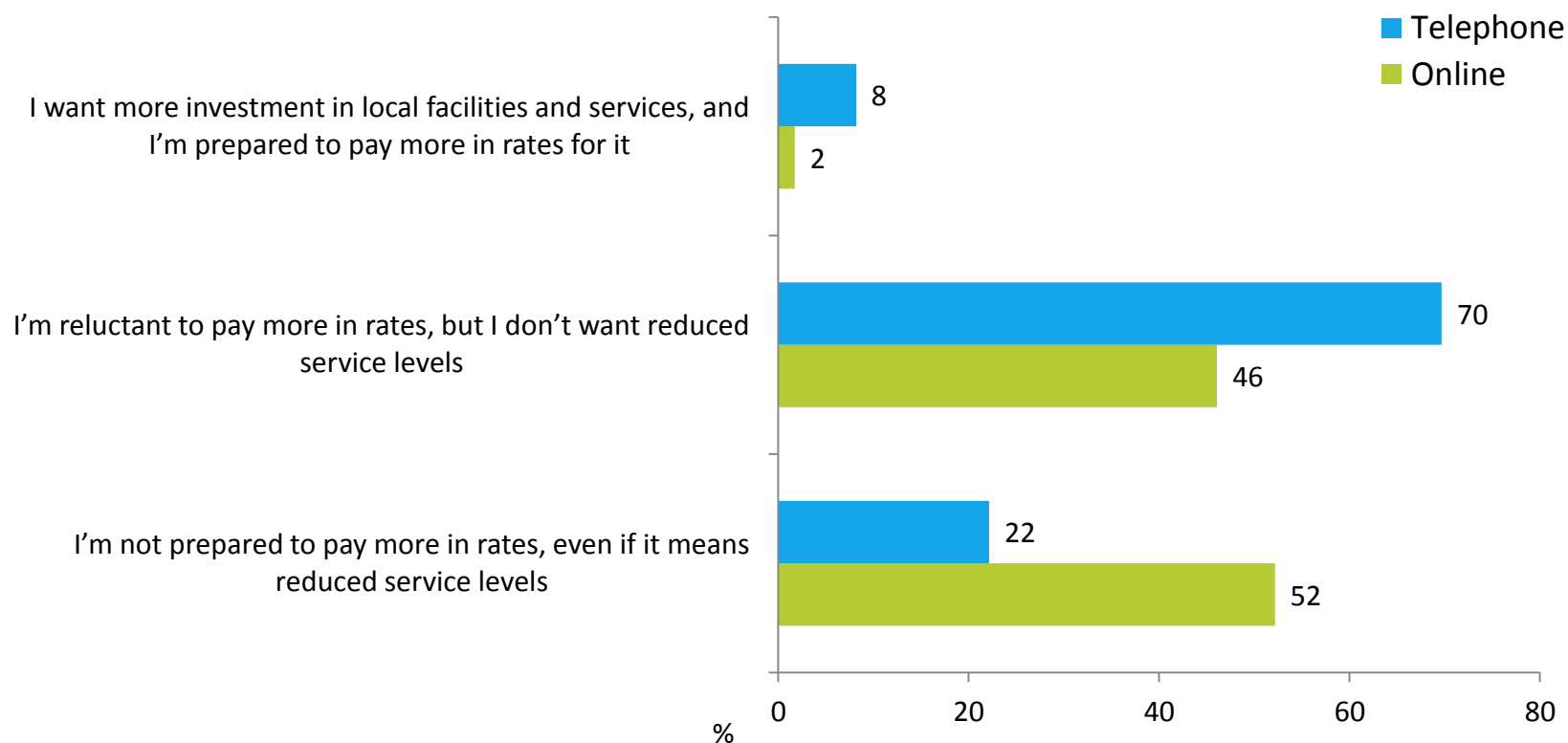
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



# Position on principle of paying more

## Community

A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) position themselves as '*not prepared to pay more in rates, even if it means reduced service levels*', more than double the number taking this position in the telephone survey (22%).



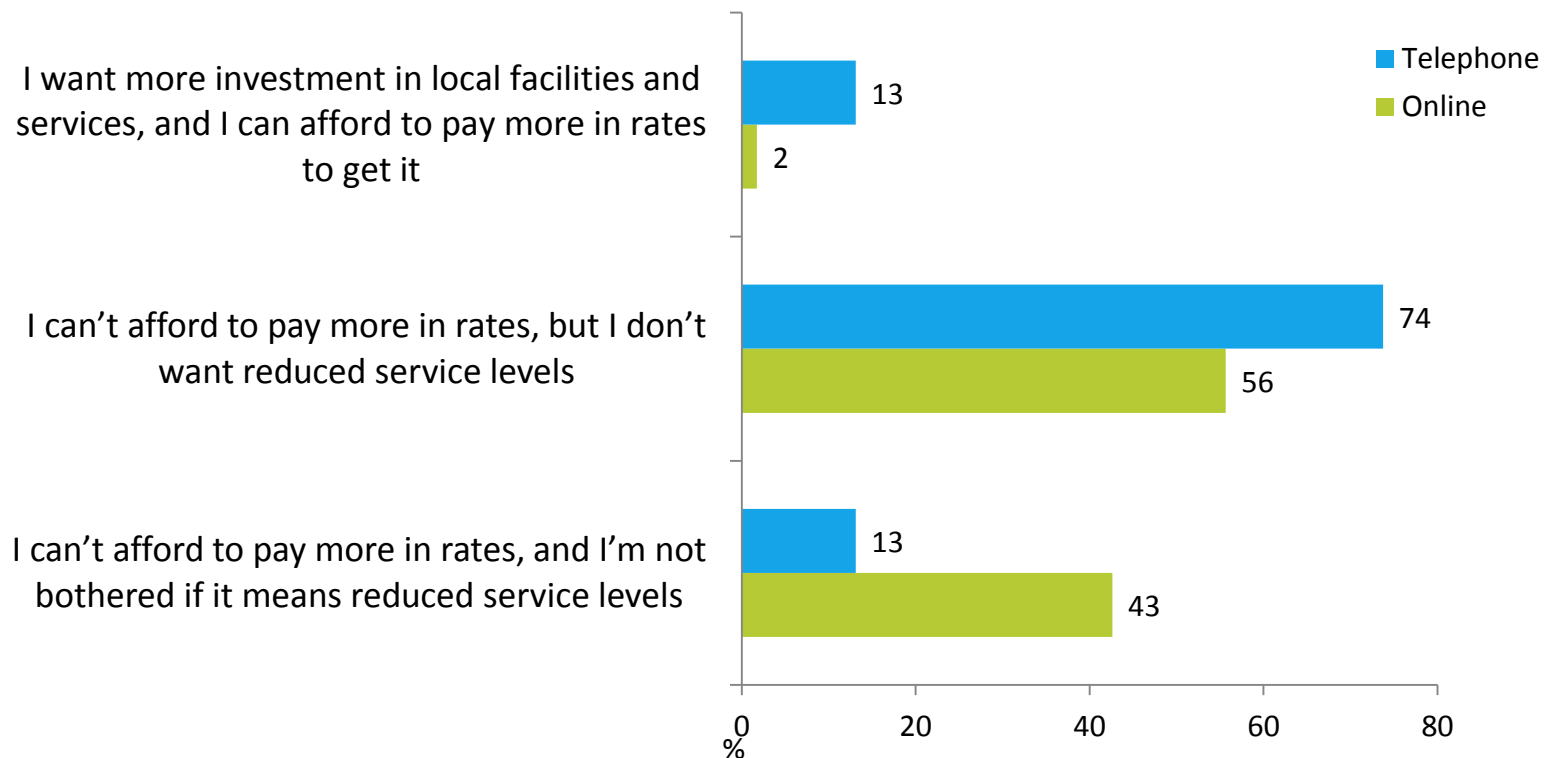
**QB4.** Which of these statements best describes your own view when you think about the balance between the level of rates and the level of services/facilities?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Whether can afford to pay more

## Community

Two in five of those completing the online survey (43%) position themselves as *'I can't afford to pay more in rates, and I'm not bothered if it means reduced service levels'*, more than three times the number taking this position in the telephone survey (13%).



**QB5.** Which of these statements best describes your own situation?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

6

## Scenarios facing Singleton Council

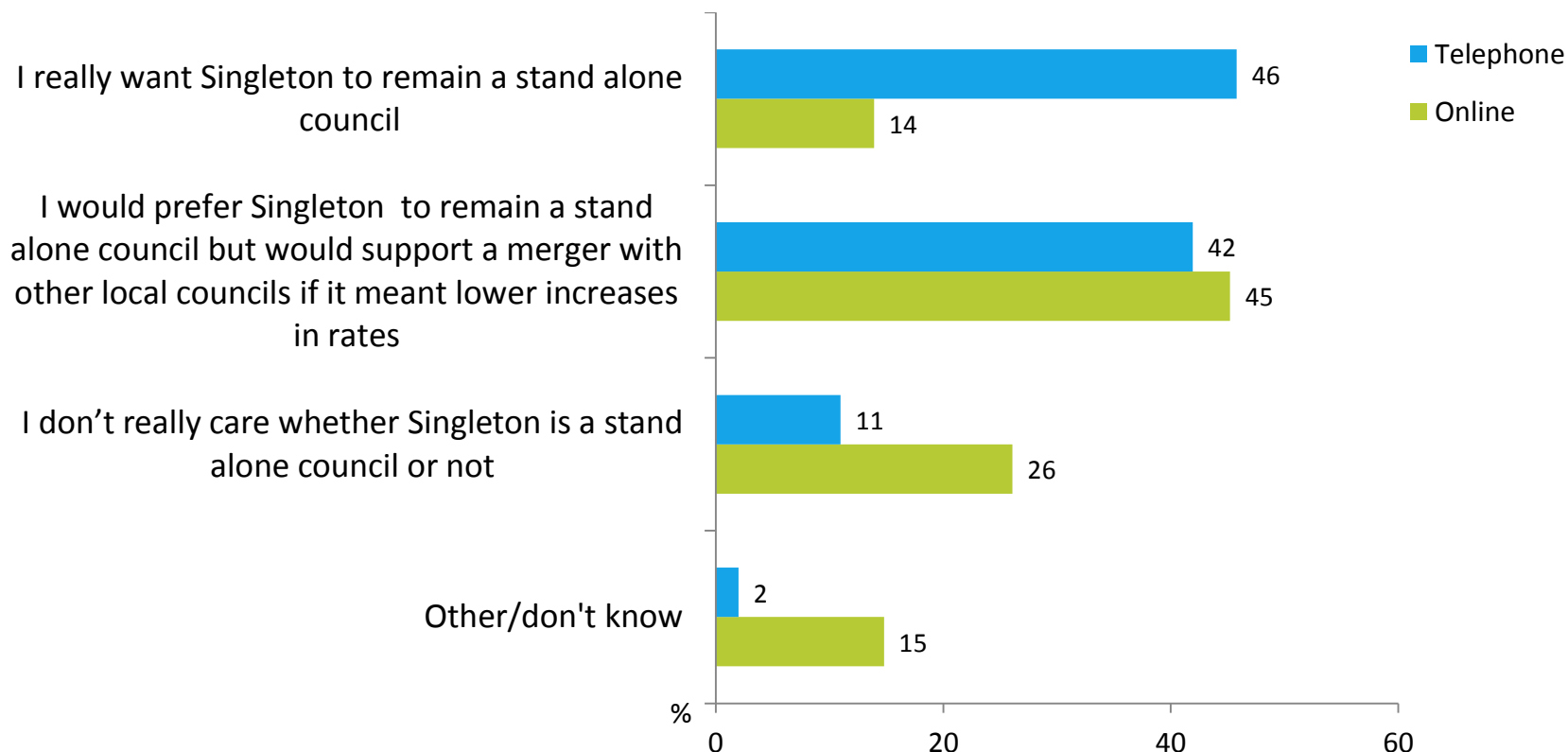
# Briefing on 'Fit for the Future' Community

Survey respondents were informed about the 'Fit for the Future' review, with the following preamble before being asked about the principle of Singleton being a stand alone council:

*A recent State Government review of local councils in NSW called 'Fit for the Future' has suggested that Singleton can remain a stand alone Council without having to merge with neighbouring councils, although it would need to raise more revenue to be able to renew local assets and maintain services.*

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council Community

In the telephone survey, residential ratepayers were split between 'I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council' (46%) and 'would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates' (42%). Only one in nine (11%) answered 'I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not' but this is one in four (26%) among those completing the online survey.



**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Scenarios Facing Singleton Council Community

Prior to being asked the key questions about the two scenarios facing Singleton Council, survey respondents were briefed as follows:

*Given the level of investment needed in local assets and facilities, and the cost of running services, Singleton Council has calculated that it would need a 9.75% increase in rates for each of the next 4 years to continue providing services at the current level and meet the NSW Government's 'Fit for the Future' requirements. Over the 4 years, this would be an increase in general rates of between 35-40%*

*As you may know, any increase in rates above the general inflation adjustment, known as the rate peg, has to be approved by the NSW State regulator, IPART.*

*For the 4 years from 2016/2017, there are effectively two options for Singleton Council and its ratepayers:*

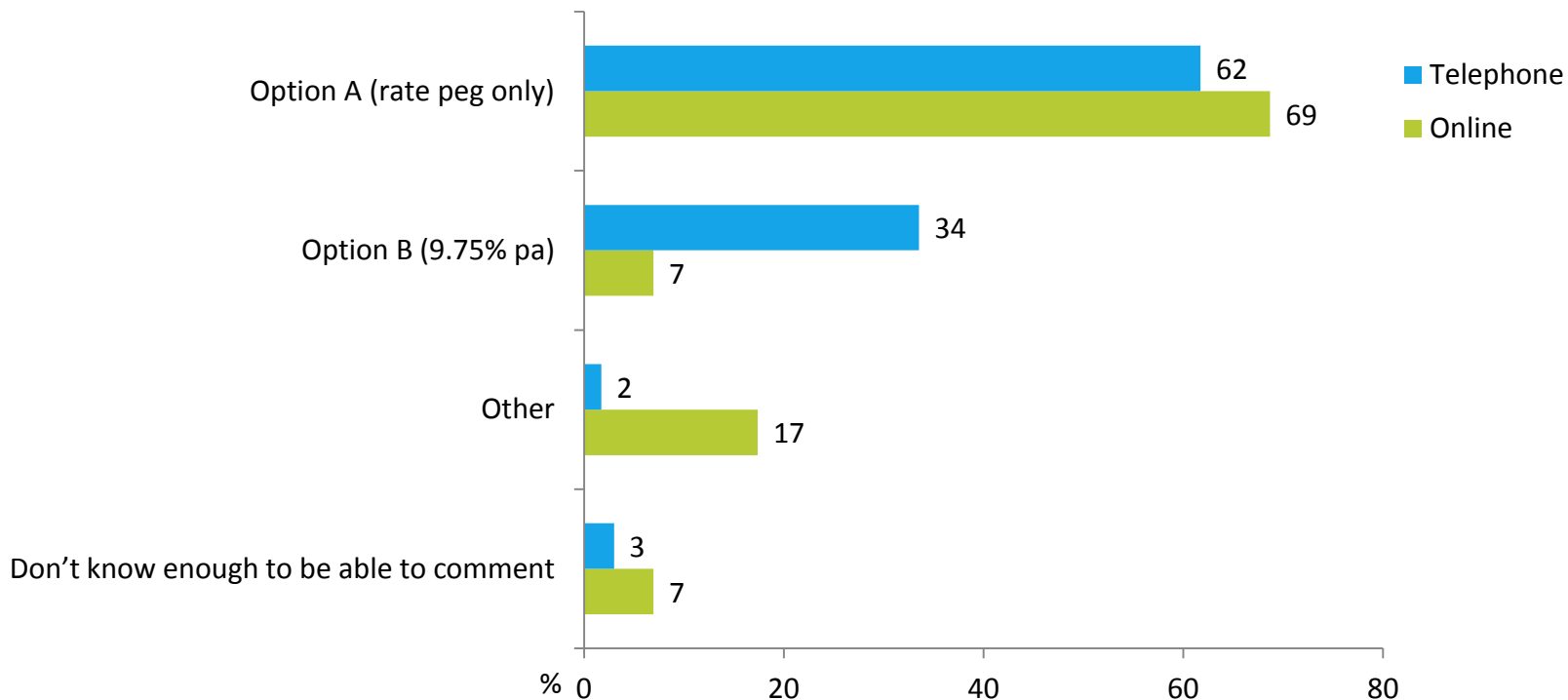
*Option A would be rates only increasing by the annual rate peg, at around 2.5% per annum. Singleton Council would not have the funds to renew or maintain local assets. Singleton Council would need to change, reduce or no longer provide some services to be able to fund asset renewal and maintenance.*

*Option B would be a 9.75% rate increase for each of the next 4 years, which would include the annual rate peg of around 2.5% per annum. It would be an increase in general rates of 35-40% over the 4 years. This would enable Singleton Council to continue to provide the current level and range of services, carry out maintenance and renew assets. Even after a 9.75% per annum increase, Singleton's rates would remain among the lowest for equivalent councils in NSW.*

# Initial A/B preference with 'other' and 'don't know'

## Community

As in the telephone survey, most of those completing the online survey express an initial preference for the rate peg only Option A (62% telephone, 69% online). However, with more answering 'other' or 'don't know enough to be able to comment', the number of online survey respondents expressing an initial preference for Option B is much lower at just 7%, compared with 34% in the telephone survey.



**QC2.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose?

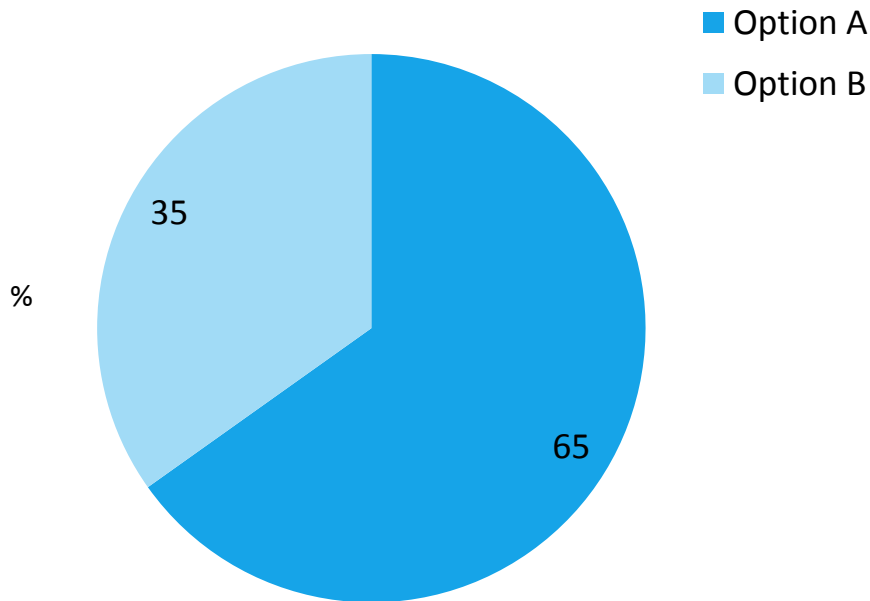
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Final preferences for A or B

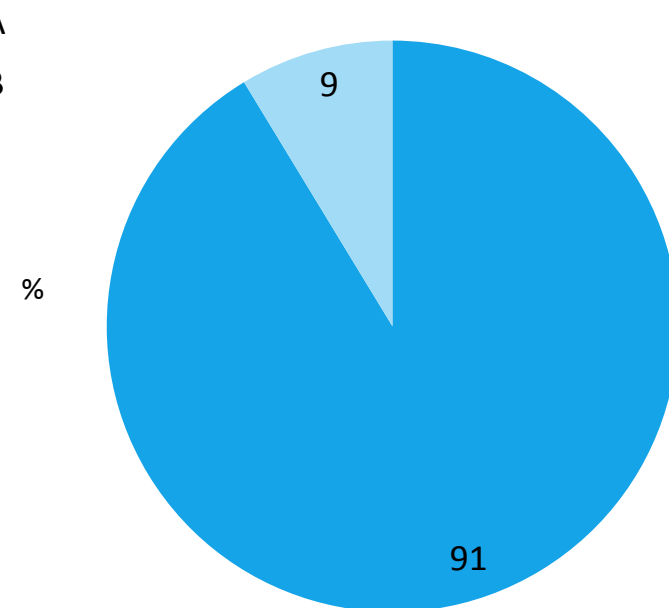
## Community

The overall results, after asking those who initially answered 'other' or 'don't know' to choose A or B, show nine in ten of the online survey respondents (91%) preferring the rate peg only Option A, compared with two in three in the telephone survey (65%).

**Telephone**



**Online**



**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

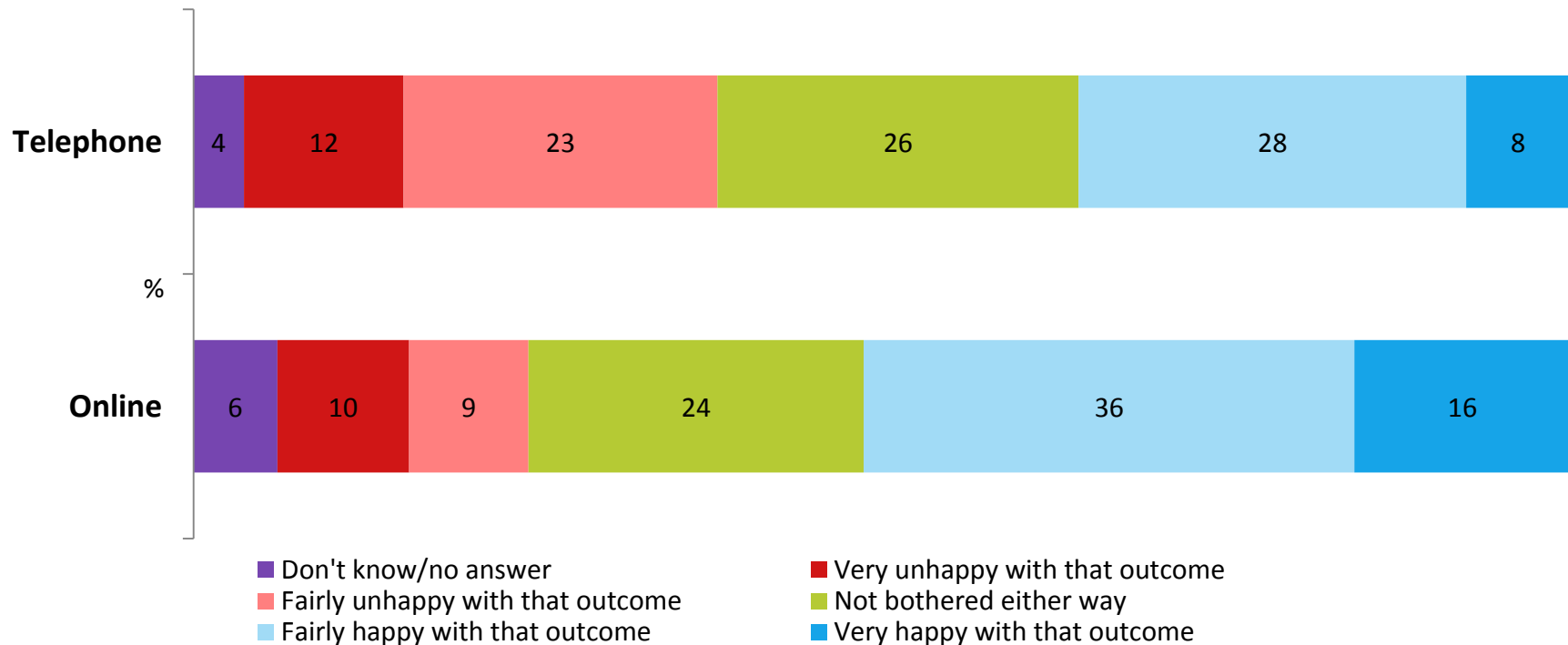
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



# Reaction if Council chose Option A

## Community

A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) say they would be happy if Singleton Council chose Option A, compared with just one in three (36%) of the residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey.



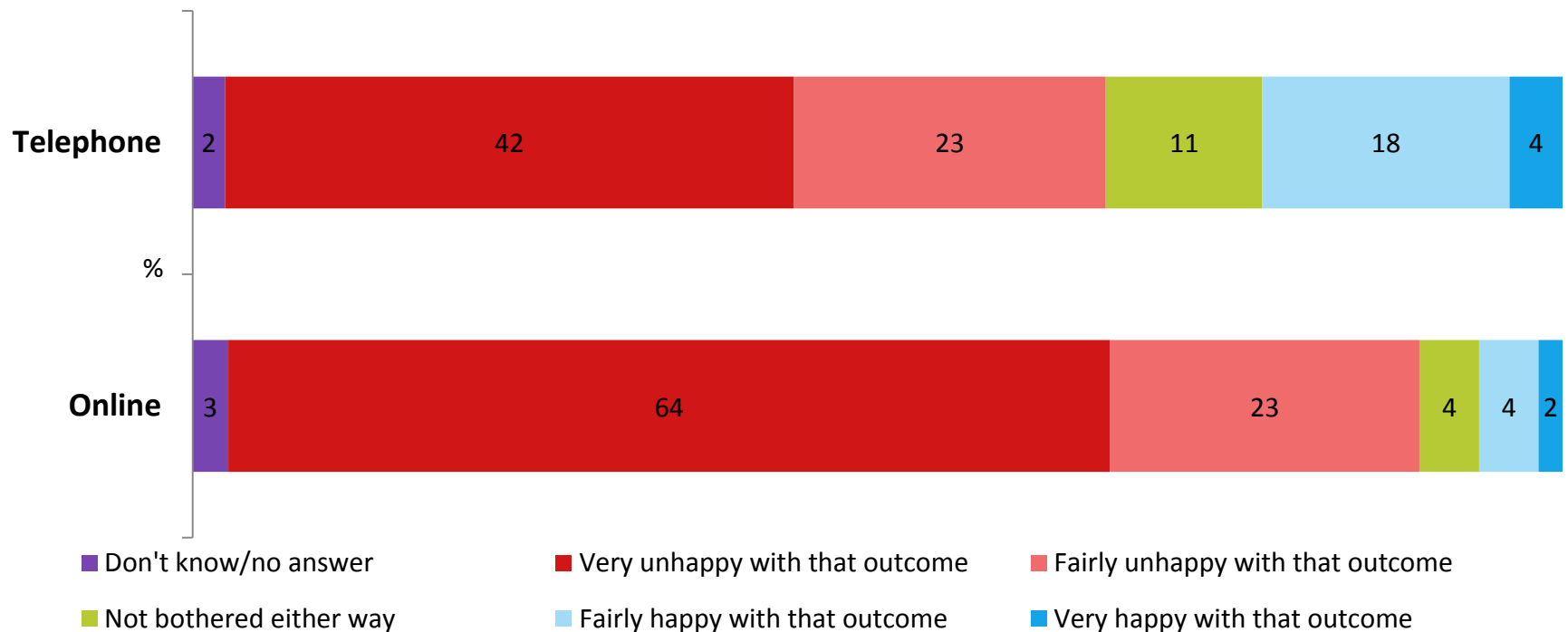
**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A (rates only increasing by the annual rate peg, around 2.5% per annum, Singleton Council not having enough resources to renew and maintain local assets, having to change, reduce or no longer provide some services) how would you react?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Reaction if Council chose Option B

## Community

Among residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey, a majority (65%) said they would be unhappy if Singleton Council chose Option B, with 42% very unhappy. Among those completing the online survey, these figures are much higher – 87% unhappy including 64% very unhappy.



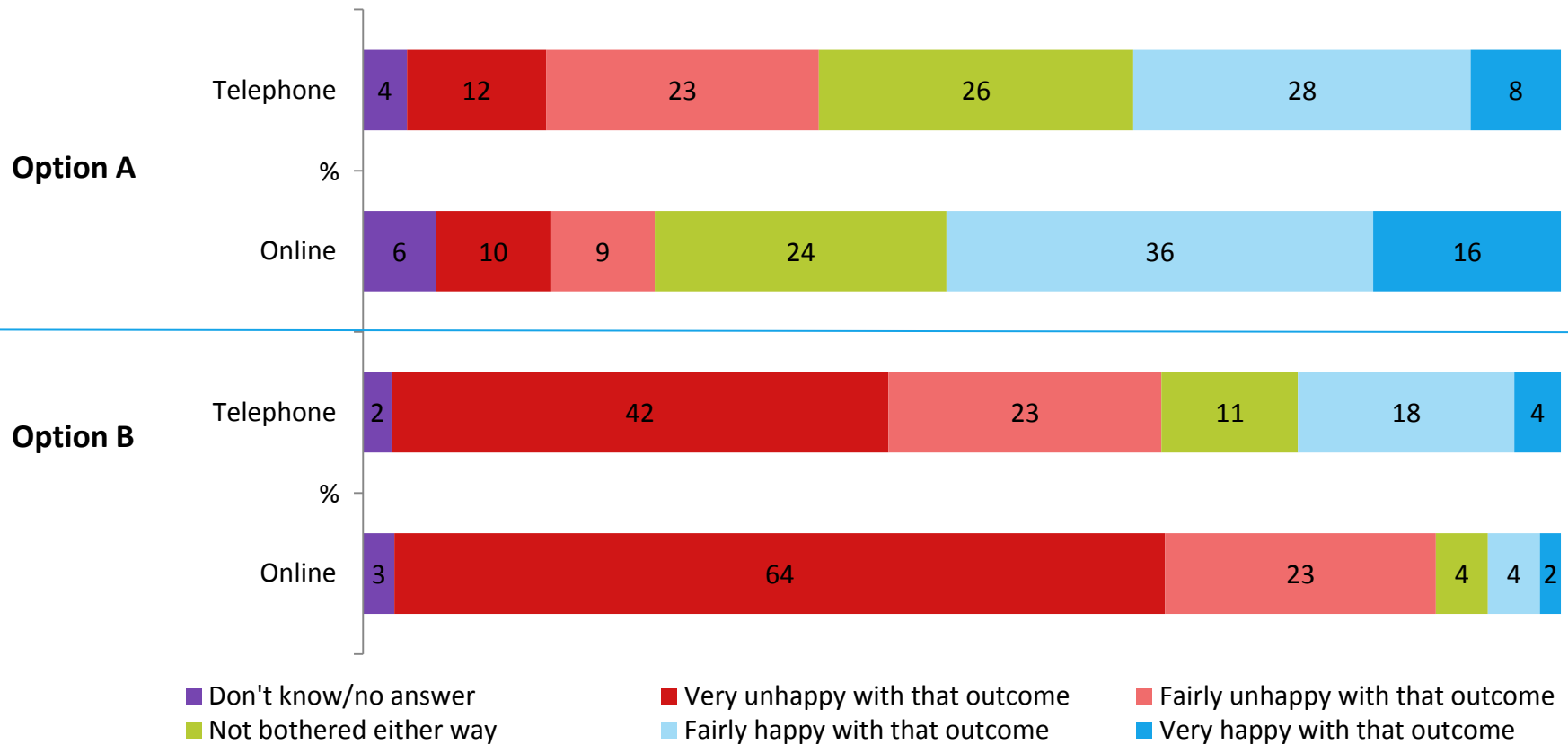
**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B (a 9.75% rate increase for each of the next 4 years, including the annual rate peg of around 2.5% per annum, an increase in general rates over the 4 years of 35-40%, with Singleton Council continuing to provide the current level and range of services, carry out maintenance and renew assets) how would you react?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community

The chart below shows the results for reactions to a decision to choose Option A or Option B among residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey and those completing the online survey.



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

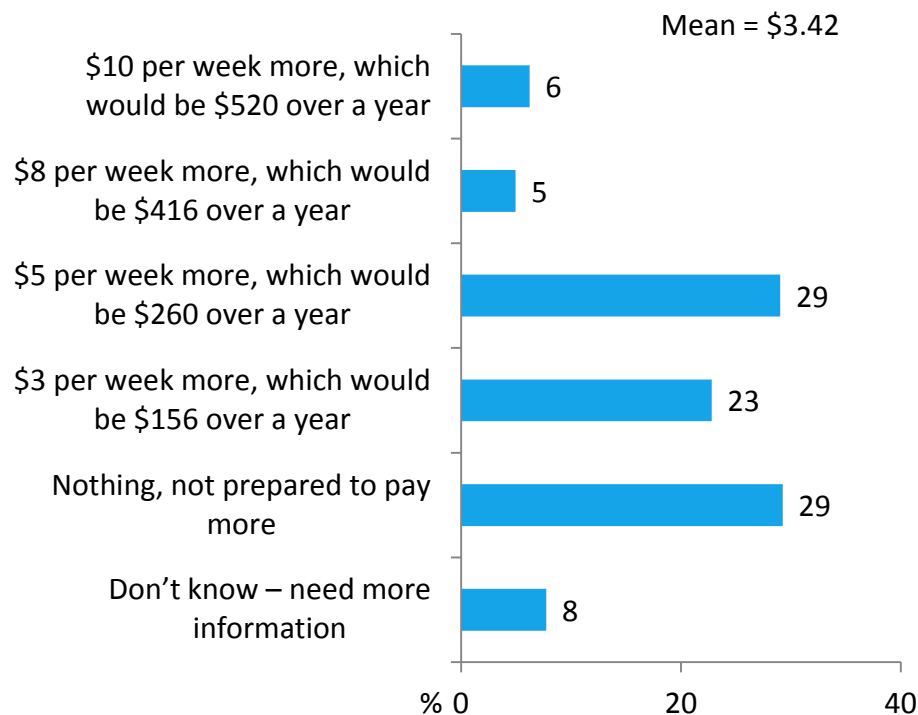
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

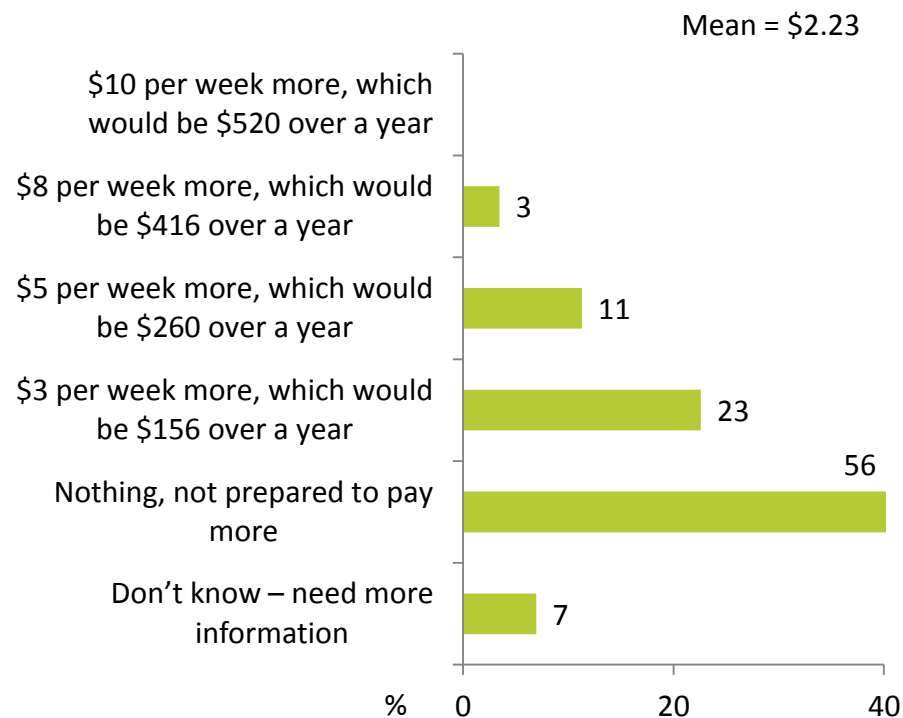
## Community

A majority of those completing the online survey (56%) are not prepared to pay anything more in rates to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level. This is almost twice as high as in the telephone survey (29%). The mean amount prepared to pay is also much lower - \$2.23 per week, compared with \$3.42.

**Telephone**



**Online**



**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



instinct<sup>and</sup>reason

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# Singleton Council SRV

## Community surveys – telephone v online

15 December 2015

[www.instinctandreason.com](http://www.instinctandreason.com)

# Document information

Prepared for	Singleton Council
Main client contacts	Mark Ihlein, Bruce Devonport
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Date	15 December 2015
Reference #	J2251

# Contents & coverage

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1

Background, objectives & approach

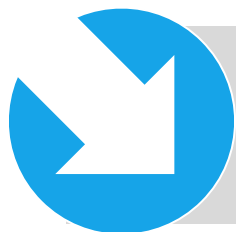
# Background & objectives

- In the context of the NSW Government's latest review, Singleton Council has been deemed 'Fit for the Future'. However, Singleton Council has also calculated that to be able to continue to meet the 7 indicators set out in the review, to renew its assets, and to maintain services at their current level, it would need a rate increase for the next 4 years of 9.75% per annum. This would require a Special Rate Variation (SRV) and approval from the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART).
- There are effectively two possible scenarios. One is a successful submission to IPART with approval for the SRV of 9.75% per annum for the next 4 years to be able to renew assets and maintain service levels. The alternative is a rate peg only increase of around 2.5% per annum for the next 4 years, which would not provide sufficient funds for asset renewal and would have adverse impacts on services. Council's preference therefore would be for the SRV.
- Singleton Council wanted to undertake a program of research, communications and community engagement to assess the potential impact of these two possible courses of action; and assess community views. Along with its own internal analysis, and an externally commissioned analysis of capacity to pay (undertaken by the Western Research Institute in Bathurst), Instinct and Reason was commissioned to undertake community research.
- This research was designed to obtain reliable, robust indicators of the views of residential ratepayers and business ratepayers; to obtain these views in light of a reasonable degree of, and balanced provision of, relevant information; to gain insight into, and understanding of, the community's perspective; to assist Singleton Council in undertaking an appropriate process of research and community engagement; and to guide the decision-making process.

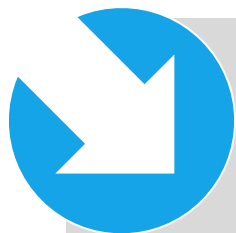
# Methodology

research among ratepayers: telephone and online

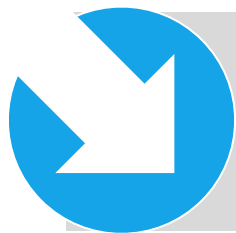
**There was a cross-sectional survey of ratepayers carried out by telephone and an online survey open to other ratepayers via the website (and follow-up qualitative research). This report compares the online survey and telephone survey results.**



A survey questionnaire was designed around the core issue of the two scenarios for rate increases and asset renewal/service levels, with other necessary questions for context and analysis. The options were carefully summarised and suitable questions devised. The survey was tested and piloted, and timed at around 12-13 minutes as a telephone interview.



A telephone survey was carried out among residential ratepayers (n=465) and business ratepayers (n=101) between 1-11 November 2015. Households were randomly selected and the ratepayer/head of household interviewed. Businesses were randomly called and interviews undertaken with the owner-proprietor (in most cases) or an appropriate director/senior manager. In each case, a good cross-section of ratepayers were surveyed.



In addition to the tightly controlled cross-sectional survey carried out by telephone, an online version of the survey was set up to provide an opportunity for other ratepayers to comment via the website, following comprehensive information being provided by Singleton Council. 115 residential ratepayers completed the online survey between 10-30 November 2015.



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## Executive summary

# Executive summary

## Online survey respondents much more likely to favour Option A and be unhappy with Option B

- ■ Among the residential ratepayers completing the online survey, nine in ten (91%) would prefer Singleton Council to choose the rate peg only increase Option A, compared with two in three of the residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey (65%).
- ■ A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) would be happy if Singleton Council chose Option A, compared with just one in three (36%) in the telephone survey.
- ■ Almost nine in ten of those completing the online survey (87%) would be unhappy if Singleton Council chose Option B, with its 9.75% pa increase over 4 years, with almost two in three (64%) very unhappy. In each case, the figures are much higher than for residential ratepayers in the telephone survey, which were already high (65% unhappy, 42% very unhappy).

# Executive summary

## Online survey respondents much less likely to be prepared to pay more, or able to pay more

- ■ A majority of those completing the online survey (56%) are not prepared to pay anything more in rates '*to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level*'. This is almost twice as high as in the telephone survey (29%).
- ■ The mean amount extra prepared to pay each week is also much lower - \$2.23 per week for the online survey respondents, compared with \$3.42 per week for the telephone survey respondents.
- ■ A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) position themselves as '*not prepared to pay more in rates, even if it means reduced service levels*', more than double the number taking this position in the telephone survey (22%).
- ■ Two in five of those completing the online survey (43%) position themselves as '*I can't afford to pay more, and I'm not bothered if it means reduced service levels*', more than three times the number taking this position in the telephone survey (13%).

# Executive summary

## Context: Online survey respondents are...

- ■ Less likely to use or perceive benefit from Singleton Council services and facilities – 33% answering ‘*a lot*’ or ‘*quite a few*’ compared with 48% in the telephone survey.
- ■ Less likely to perceive value from what they currently pay in rates – 47% answering ‘*poor value*’, compared with 27% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to think the rates are high – 71% do, much higher than the 53% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to reject the suggestion that Singleton has historically had low rate increases – 67% answer ‘*no*’, compared with 31% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to reject the suggestion that Singleton has historically had low rates compared with neighbouring councils – 57% answer ‘*no*’, compared with 31% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to think of Singleton Council as ‘*wasteful and inefficient*’ – 70% answer ‘*yes*’, compared with 43% in the telephone survey.

# Executive summary

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## Profile: Online survey respondents are...

- ■ More likely to be aged under 45 – 66% are, compared with 21% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to have children living at home – 61% have, compared with 36% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to be employed full-time – 49% are, compared with 29% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to have a mortgage – 79% have, compared with 56% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to live out-of-town – 51% do, compared with 32% in the telephone survey.
- ■ More likely to answer '*I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not*' – 26% give this answer, compared with 11% in the telephone survey.





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## Sample profiles

# Sample profile – Residents

## gender, age, household composition

Gender	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Man	210	45	48	42
Woman	255	55	67	58

Age	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Under 45	96	21	76	66
45-54	139	30	21	18
55-64	121	26	11	10
65+	109	23	7	6

Those completing the online survey are particularly likely to be aged under 45 and to have children aged under 16

Household situation	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Single under 30 years	1	*	2	2
Single 30 years and over	54	12	5	4
Share accommodation	3	1	0	0
Couple without children	133	29	23	20
Family with most children under 16 years	100	22	58	50
Family with most children 16 years and over	158	34	22	19
Other	16	3	5	4

Children living at home	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Yes, aged under 6	33	7	35	30
Yes, aged 6-10	32	7	24	21
Yes, aged 11-15	37	8	27	24
Yes, aged 16-18	67	14	11	10
No	296	64	45	39

# Sample profile - Residents

## employment/main activity and internet access

Those completing the online survey are particularly likely to be employed full-time.

Employment/main activity	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100</b>
Employed full-time	137	29	56	49
Employed part-time/flexible hours	79	17	25	22
Self-employed	37	8	15	13
Unemployed and seeking work	11	2	2	2
Unemployed and not seeking work	6	1	0	0
Unable to work due to ill-health or disability, or being a carer for someone with ill health or a disability	10	2	1	1
Retired (self-funded or eligible pensioner)	150	32	5	4
Looking after the home full-time	30	6	6	5
Student on full-time course	0	0	0	0
Other	5	1	4	4

# Sample profile - Residents

## home location, housing tenure, and income

Home location	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %	Annual household income before tax	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
Singleton town	317	68	56	49	Less than \$25,000	55	12	3	3
Out-of-town	148	32	59	51	Between \$25,000 and \$49,000	68	15	13	11
					Between \$50,000 and \$74,000	58	12	6	5
					Between \$75,000 and \$99,000	52	11	19	17
					Between \$100,000 and \$149,000	83	18	23	20
					Between \$150,000 and \$199,000	43	9	6	5
					\$200,000 or more	8	2	4	3
					Prefer not to say	98	21	41	36

Housing tenure	Telephone n=	Telephone %	Online n=	Online %
<b>Total Sample</b>	<b>465</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100</b>
I live in a house that I own outright	256	55	22	19
I live in a house I'm buying with a mortgage	201	43	87	76
I live in a unit that I own outright	4	1	0	0
I live in a unit I'm buying with a mortgage	3	1	4	3
Other	1	*	2	2

Those completing the online survey are particularly likely to have a mortgage and to be living outside of the town of Singleton



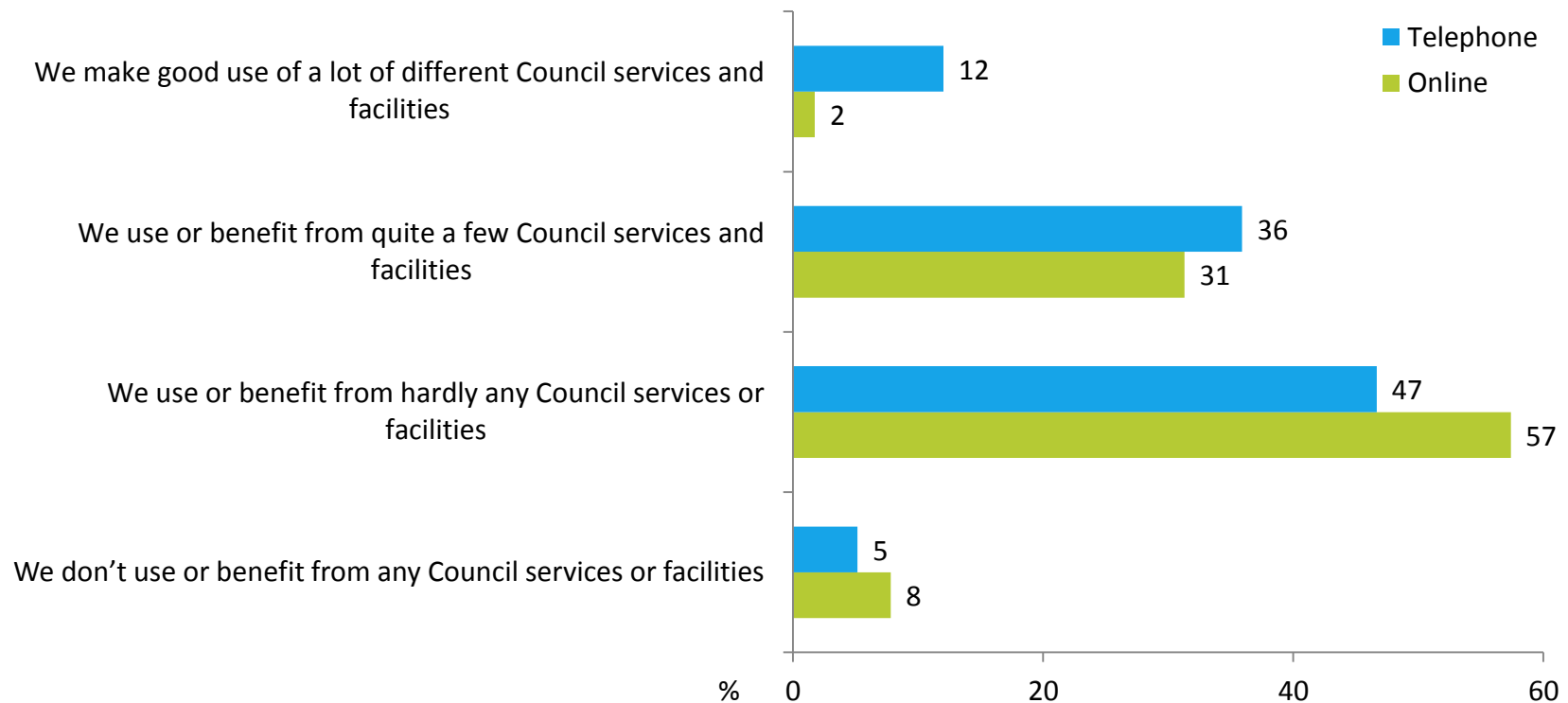
4

## Singleton Council services and communications

# Use of Council services and facilities

## Community

Those who responded to the online survey were less likely to consider themselves to use or benefit from Council services and facilities. The proportion answering 'don't use any' or 'hardly any' is 65%, compared with 52% for the telephone survey respondents.



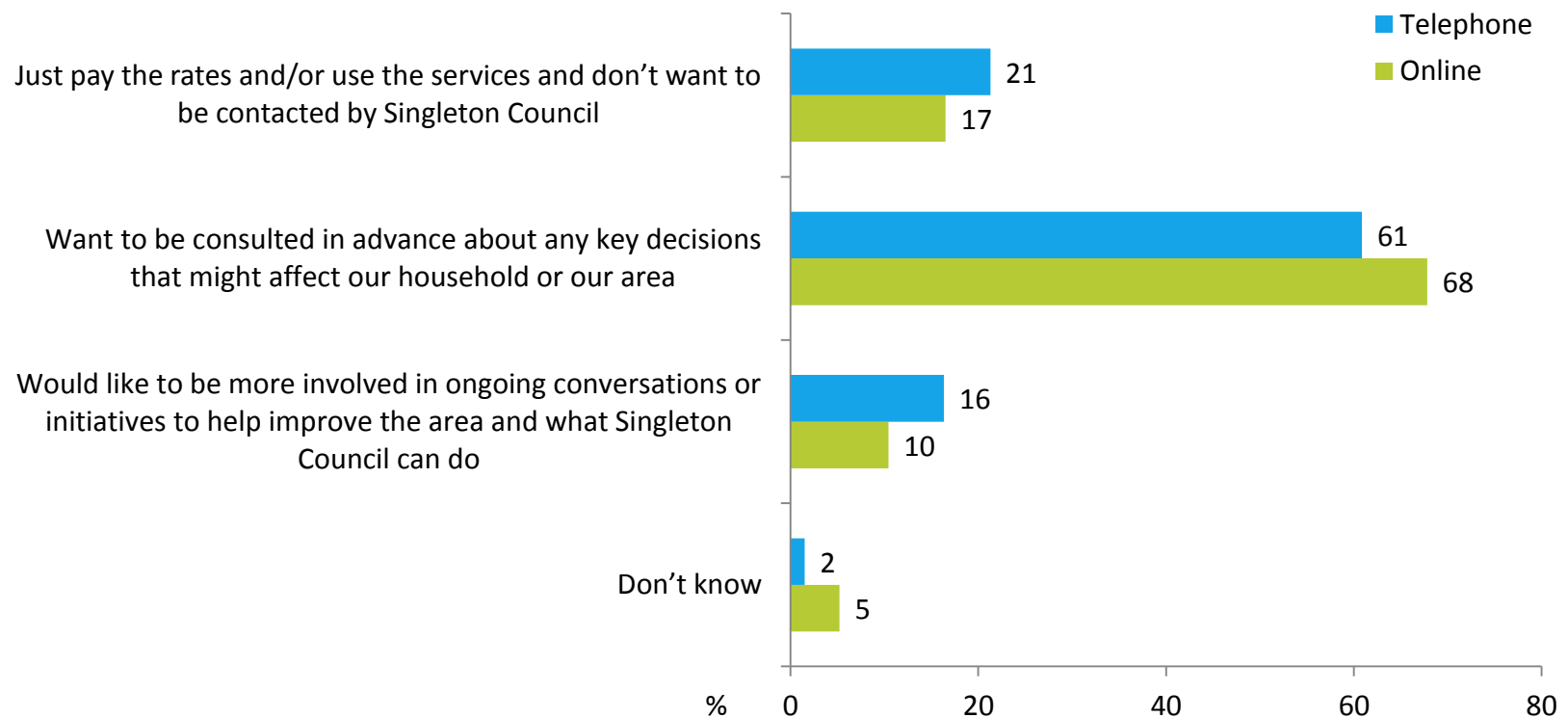
**QA1.** Which of these statements best describes your household?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Preferred relationship with Singleton Council

## Community

A majority of both the telephone survey respondents (61%) and the online survey respondents (68%) want to be consulted about key decisions that might affect their household or their area.



**QA2.** Which best describes your own situation in terms of your preferred relationship with Singleton Council?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



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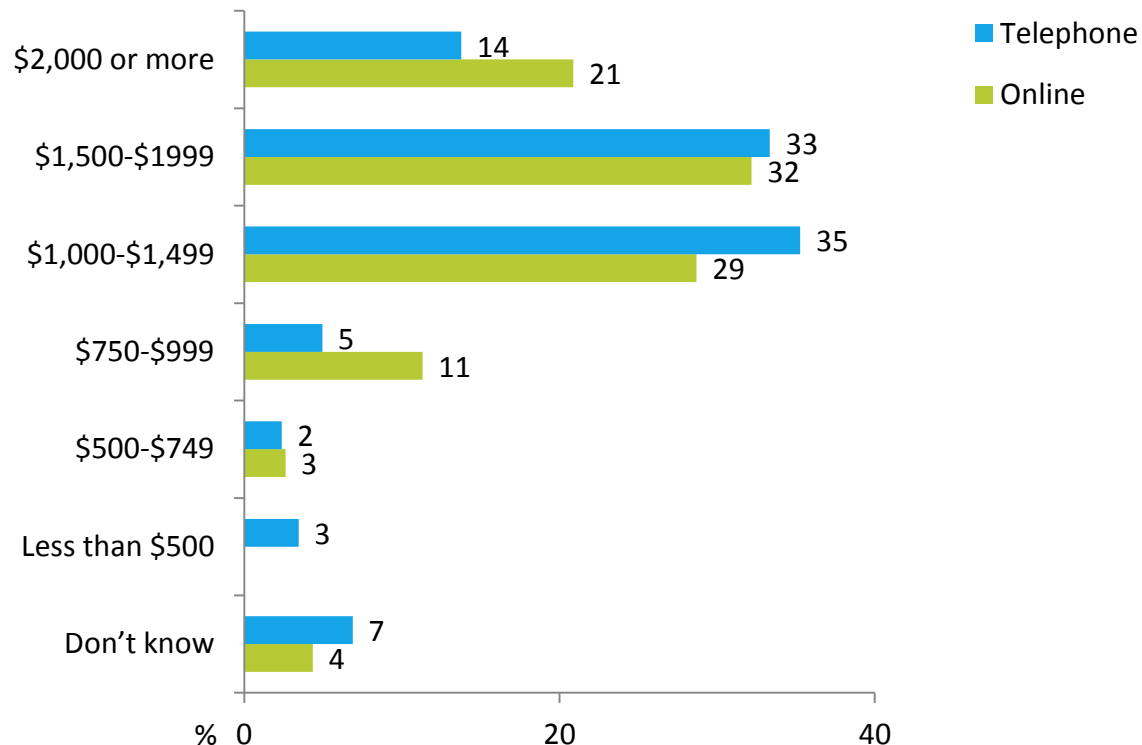
Levels of rates and services



# Current rates paid to Singleton Council

## Community

There is no significant difference between the residential ratepayers surveyed by telephone and those surveyed online by current amount they (say they) pay in general rates.



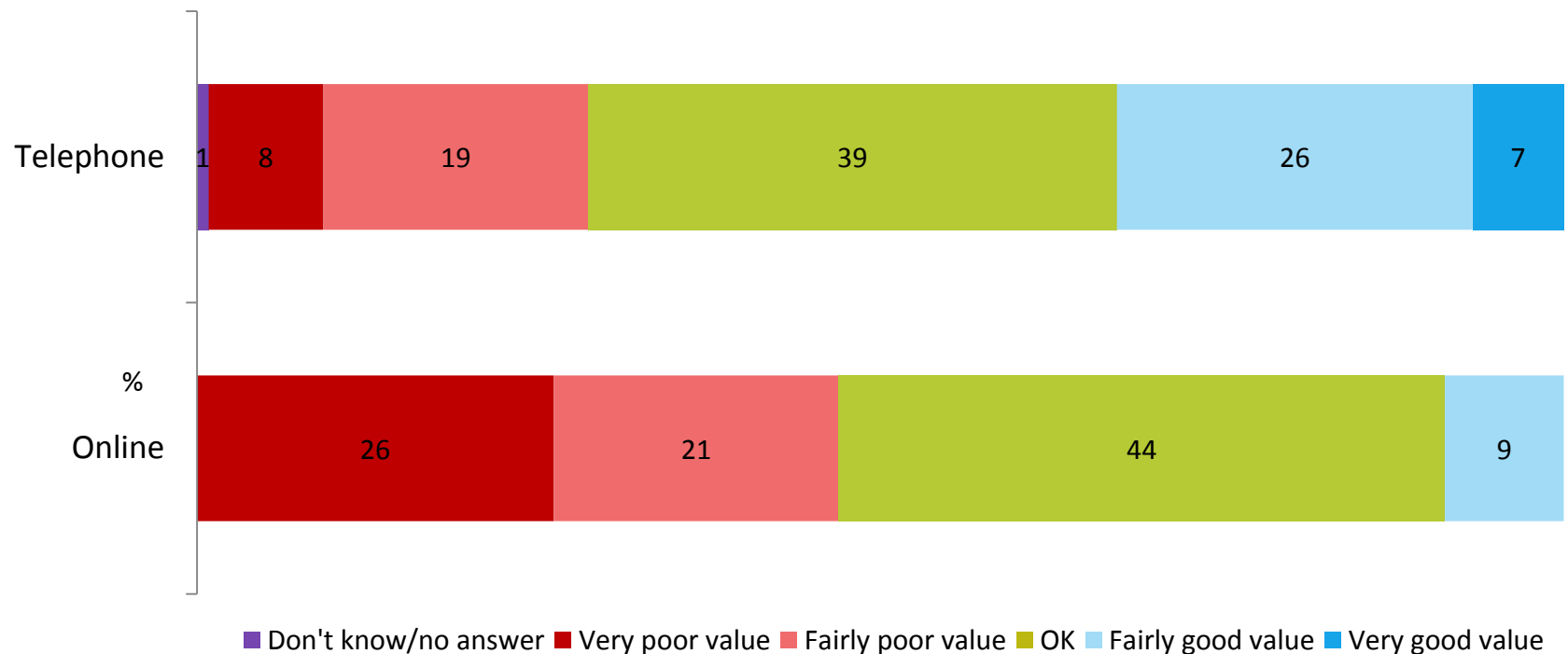
**QB2.** How much does your household currently pay in general rates each year to Singleton Council? By 'general rates', we mean excluding water and sewerage charges.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Value rating of Council services and facilities

## Community

Those completing the online survey are more likely to take the view that the services and facilities provided by Singleton Council are poor value given what they pay in rates. In the telephone survey, it was 33% good and 27% poor. In the online survey, it is just 9% good and 47% poor.



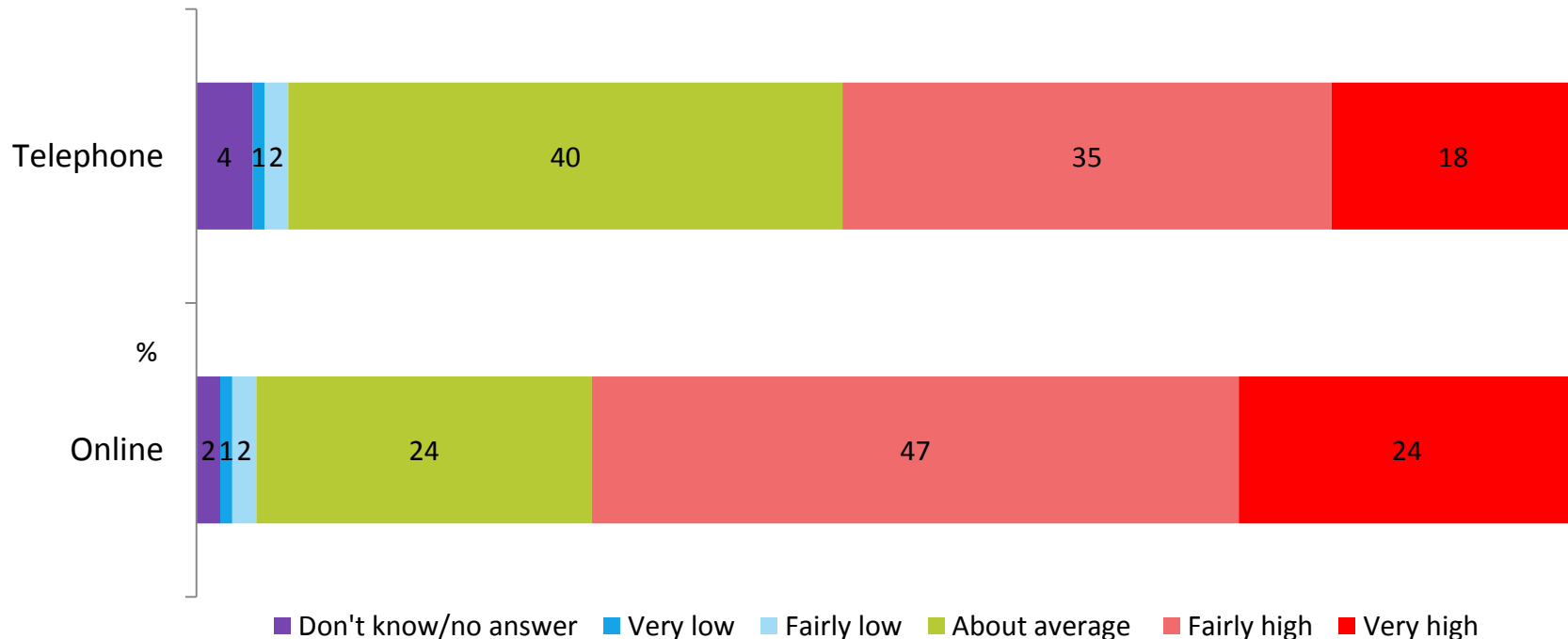
**QB3.** How would you rate the services and facilities provided by Singleton Council given what you pay in rates?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Singleton Council rates high, average or low?

## Community

Those completing the online survey are more likely to take the view that the Council rates in Singleton are high. It was already a majority (53%) in the telephone survey. It is much higher in the online survey, with seven in ten (71%) believing the rates to be high.



**QB1.** Based on the knowledge you have or overall impression you have, are the Council rates in Singleton high, low or average? Would you say...?

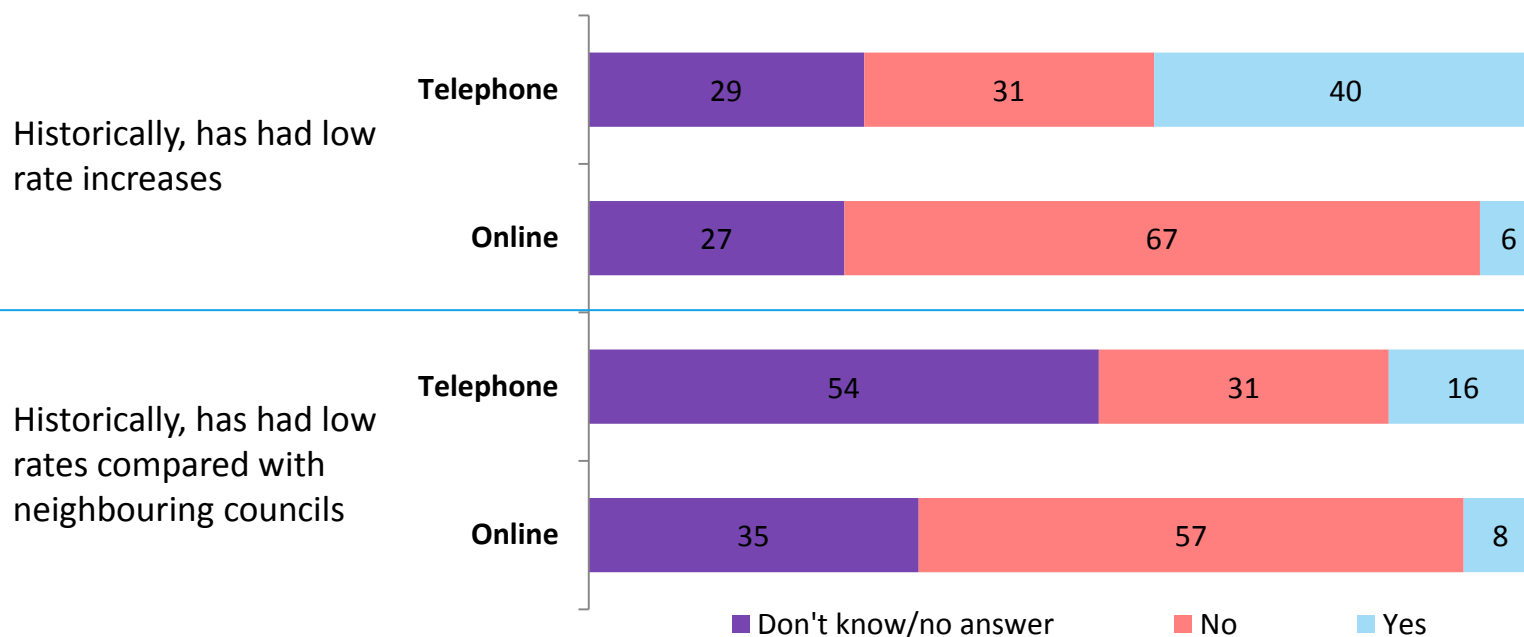
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Perception of historic level of rates/rate rises

## Community

In the telephone survey, there were mixed views on whether Singleton has historically had low rate increases – 40% say yes, 31% no, 29% don't know. In the online survey, the results are more clear cut – 67% say no.

Asked about whether Singleton has had historically low rates compared with neighbouring councils, the online respondents are again more likely to say no – 57% do so, compared with 31% in the telephone survey.



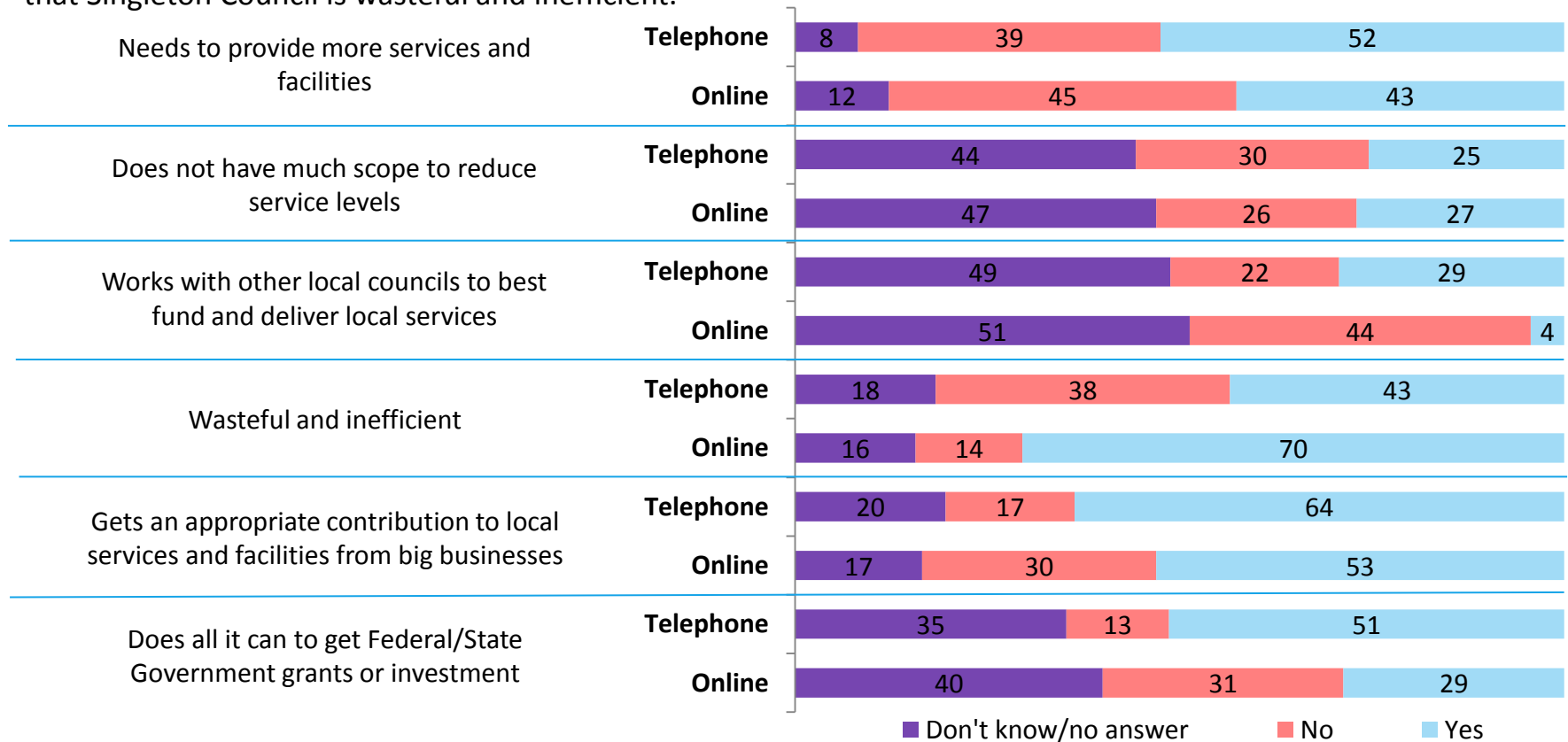
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Other perceptions of Singleton Council

## Community

In the report on the telephone survey results, it was highlighted that it is difficult to make a case for increased rates to ratepayers who have a perception of waste or inefficiency.; and that 43% of residential ratepayers surveyed by telephone took this view. Among those completing the online survey, seven in ten (70%) think that Singleton Council is wasteful and inefficient.



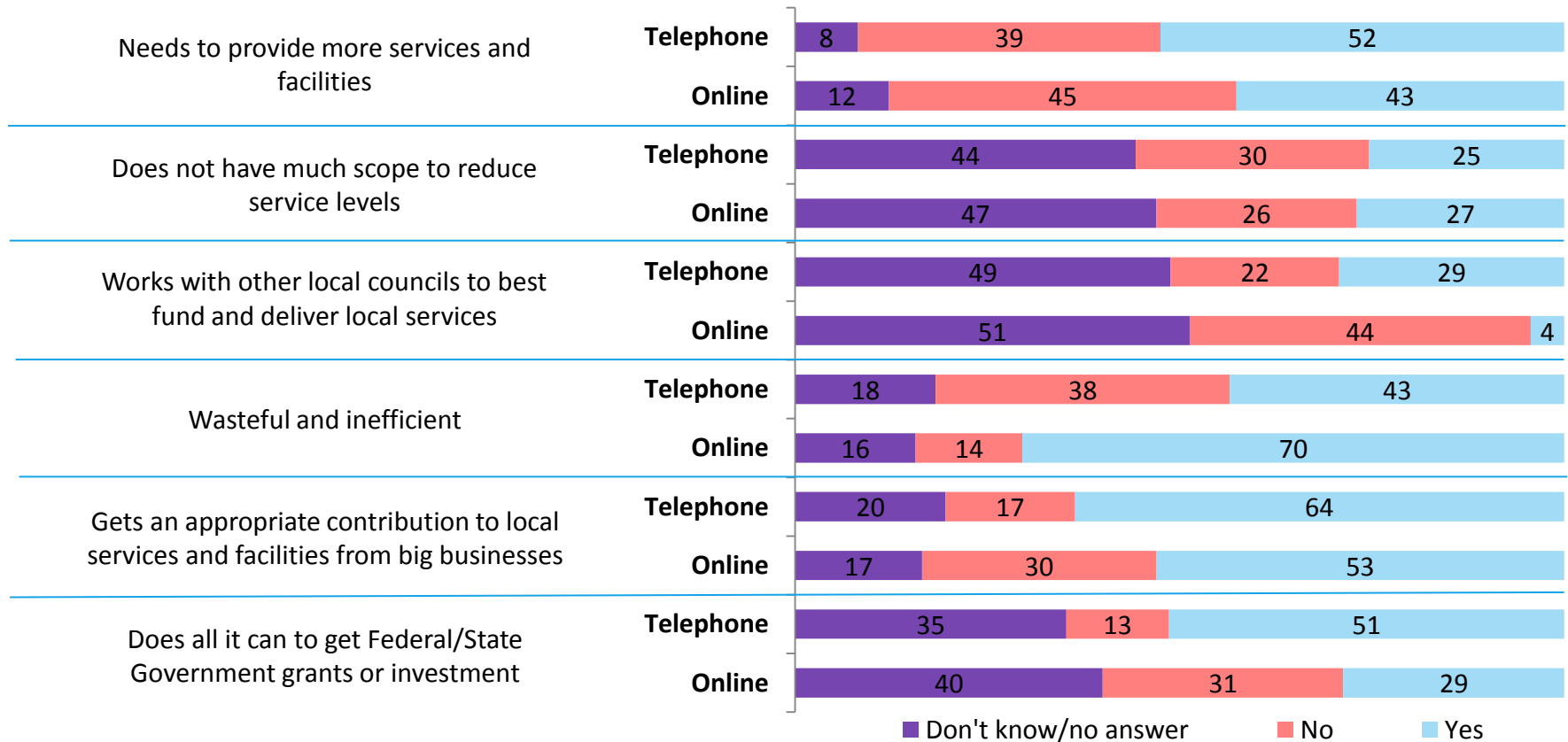
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Other perceptions of Singleton Council (cont'd)

## Community

Those taking part in the online survey also have more negative views with regard to shared services initiatives , maximising Federal/State grants or investments, and getting an appropriate contribution from big businesses.



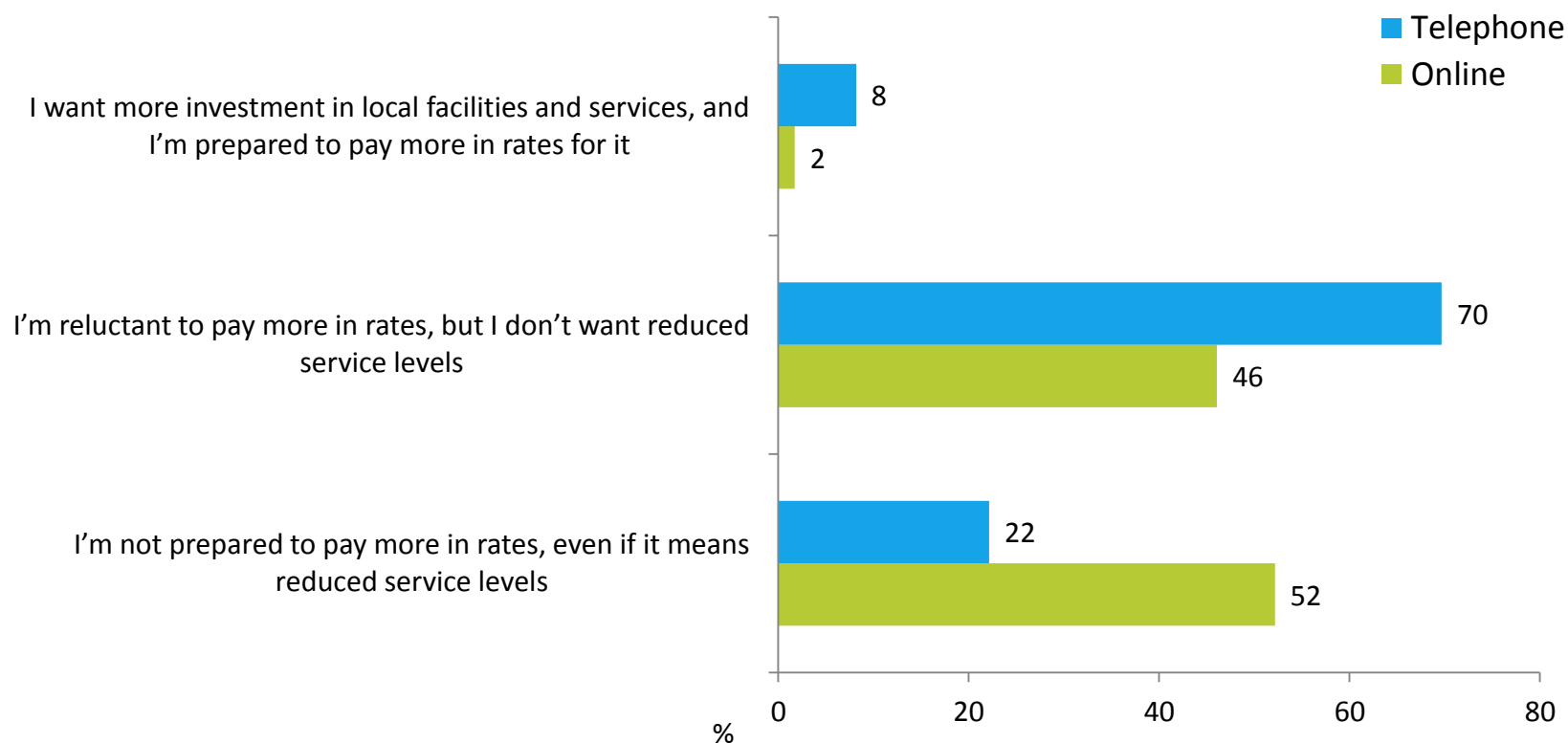
**QB6.** Which of these apply to Singleton Council? Please answer 'yes', 'no' or 'don't know'.

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Position on principle of paying more

## Community

A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) position themselves as *'not prepared to pay more in rates, even if it means reduced service levels'*, more than double the number taking this position in the telephone survey (22%).



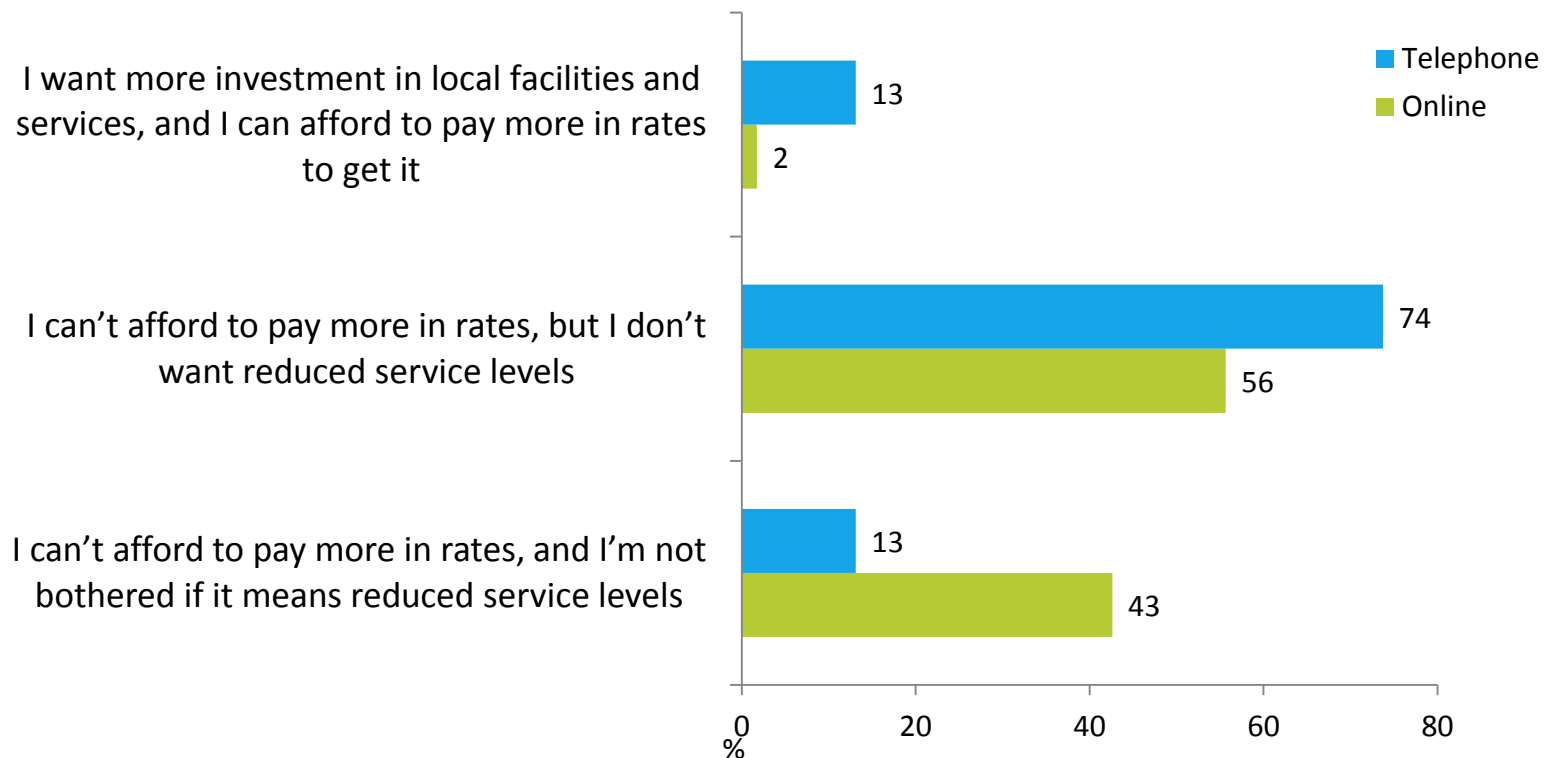
**QB4.** Which of these statements best describes your own view when you think about the balance between the level of rates and the level of services/facilities?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Whether can afford to pay more

## Community

Two in five of those completing the online survey (43%) position themselves as *'I can't afford to pay more in rates, and I'm not bothered if it means reduced service levels'*, more than three times the number taking this position in the telephone survey (13%).



**QB5.** Which of these statements best describes your own situation?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



6

## Scenarios facing Singleton Council

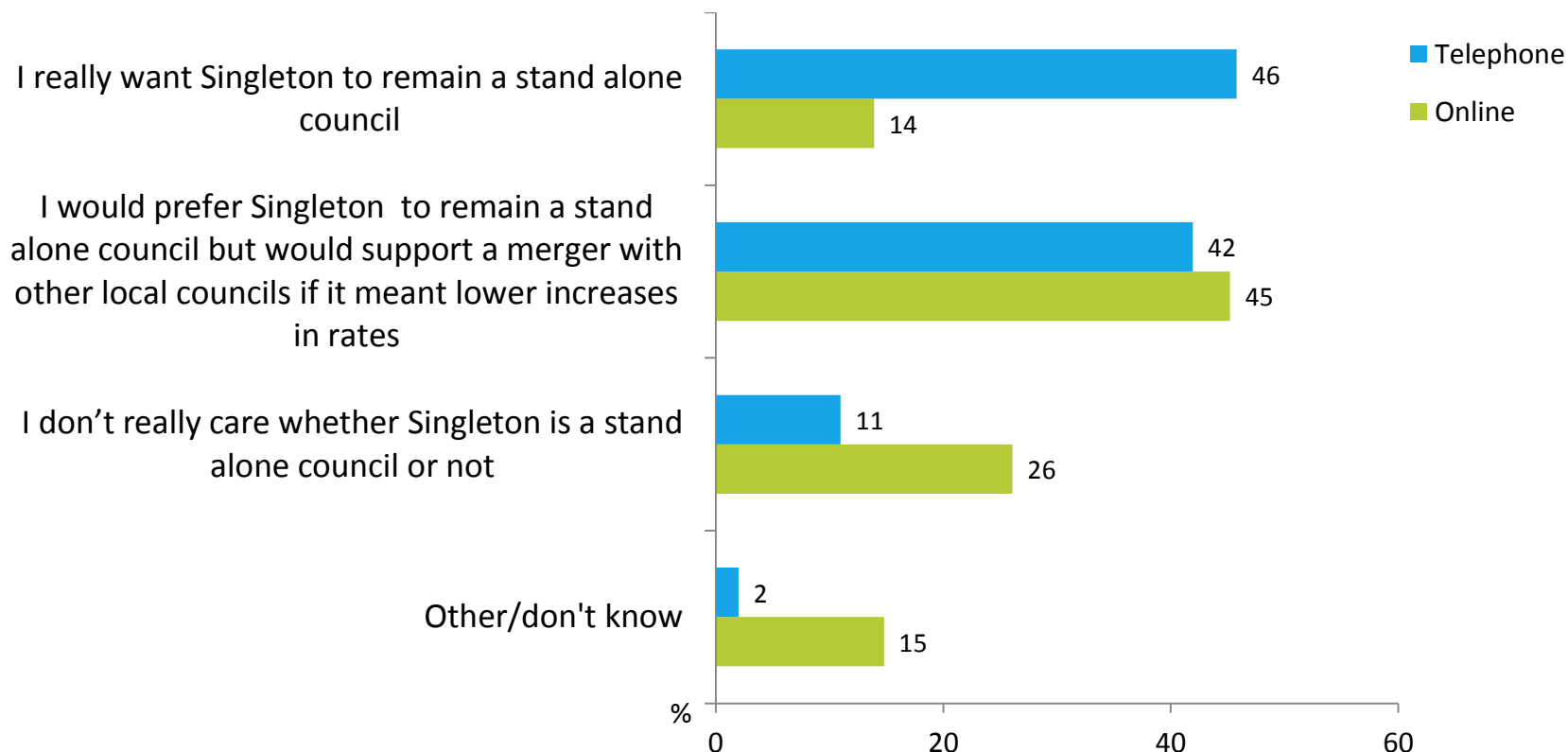
# Briefing on 'Fit for the Future' Community

Survey respondents were informed about the 'Fit for the Future' review, with the following preamble before being asked about the principle of Singleton being a stand alone council:

*A recent State Government review of local councils in NSW called 'Fit for the Future' has suggested that Singleton can remain a stand alone Council without having to merge with neighbouring councils, although it would need to raise more revenue to be able to renew local assets and maintain services.*

# Singleton as a 'stand alone' Council Community

In the telephone survey, residential ratepayers were split between 'I really want Singleton to remain a stand alone council' (46%) and 'would prefer Singleton to remain a stand alone council but would support a merger with other local councils if it meant lower increases in rates' (42%). Only one in nine (11%) answered 'I don't really care whether Singleton is a stand alone council or not' but this is one in four (26%) among those completing the online survey.



**QC1.** And which of these three statements best sums up your own view?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Scenarios Facing Singleton Council Community

Prior to being asked the key questions about the two scenarios facing Singleton Council, survey respondents were briefed as follows:

*Given the level of investment needed in local assets and facilities, and the cost of running services, Singleton Council has calculated that it would need a 9.75% increase in rates for each of the next 4 years to continue providing services at the current level and meet the NSW Government's 'Fit for the Future' requirements. Over the 4 years, this would be an increase in general rates of between 35-40%*

*As you may know, any increase in rates above the general inflation adjustment, known as the rate peg, has to be approved by the NSW State regulator, IPART.*

*For the 4 years from 2016/2017, there are effectively two options for Singleton Council and its ratepayers:*

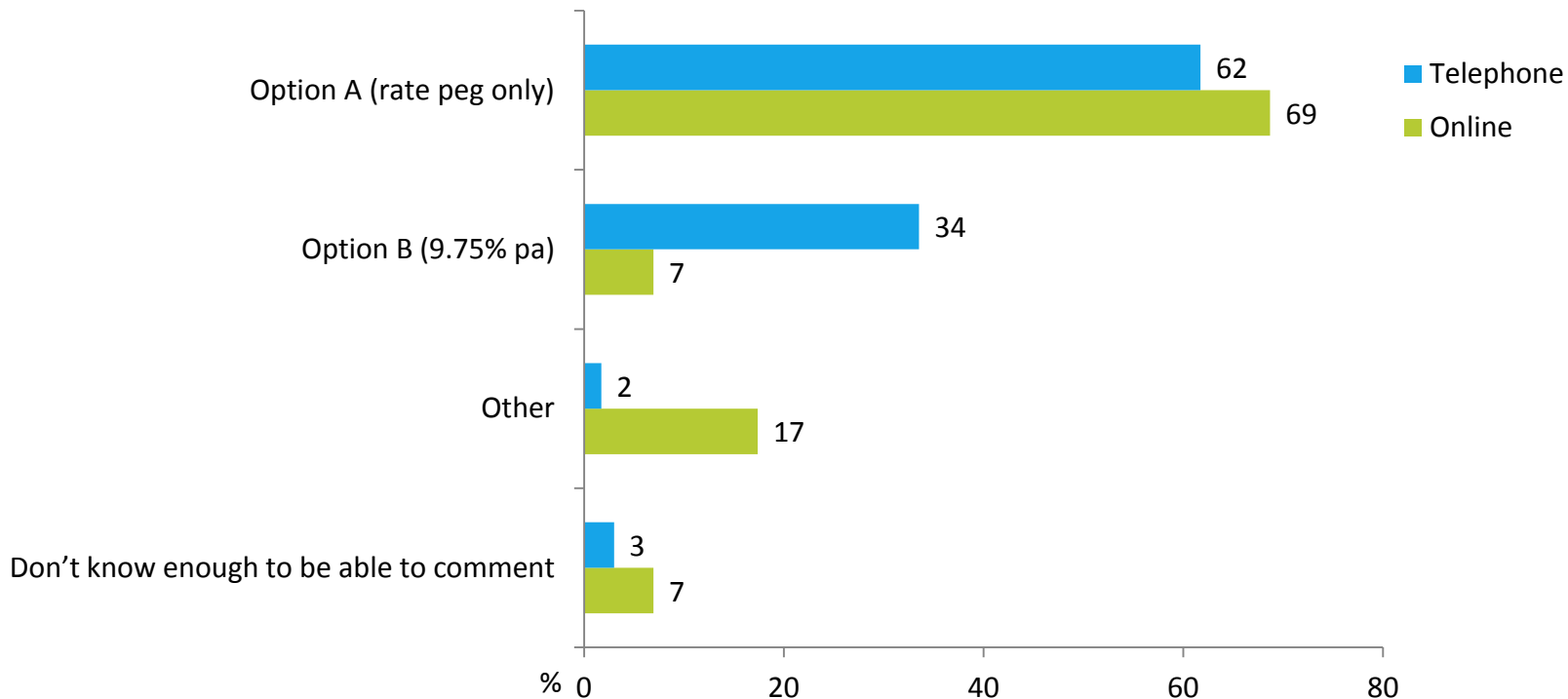
*Option A would be rates only increasing by the annual rate peg, at around 2.5% per annum. Singleton Council would not have the funds to renew or maintain local assets. Singleton Council would need to change, reduce or no longer provide some services to be able to fund asset renewal and maintenance.*

*Option B would be a 9.75% rate increase for each of the next 4 years, which would include the annual rate peg of around 2.5% per annum. It would be an increase in general rates of 35-40% over the 4 years. This would enable Singleton Council to continue to provide the current level and range of services, carry out maintenance and renew assets. Even after a 9.75% per annum increase, Singleton's rates would remain among the lowest for equivalent councils in NSW.*

# Initial A/B preference with 'other' and 'don't know'

## Community

As in the telephone survey, most of those completing the online survey express an initial preference for the rate peg only Option A (62% telephone, 69% online). However, with more answering 'other' or 'don't know enough to be able to comment', the number of online survey respondents expressing an initial preference for Option B is much lower at just 7%, compared with 34% in the telephone survey.



**QC2.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose?

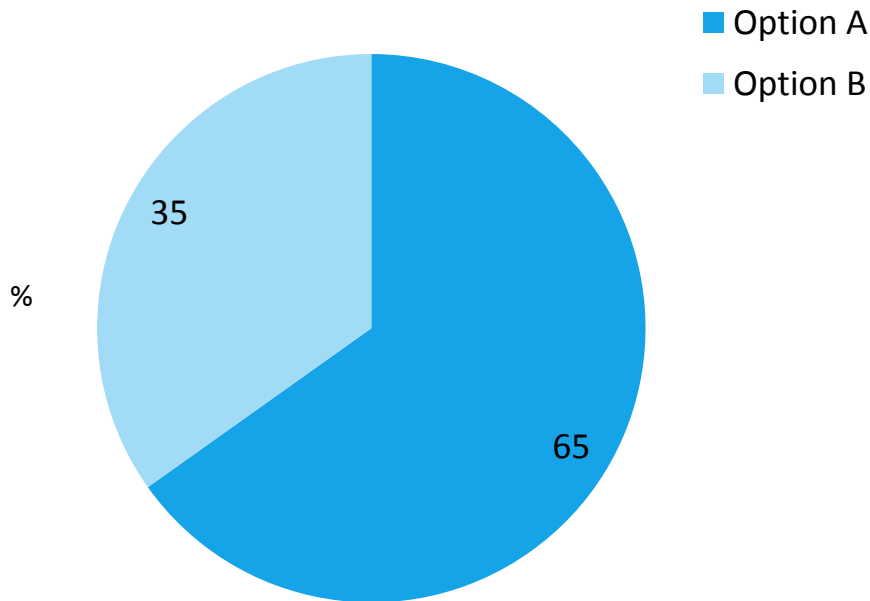
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Final preferences for A or B

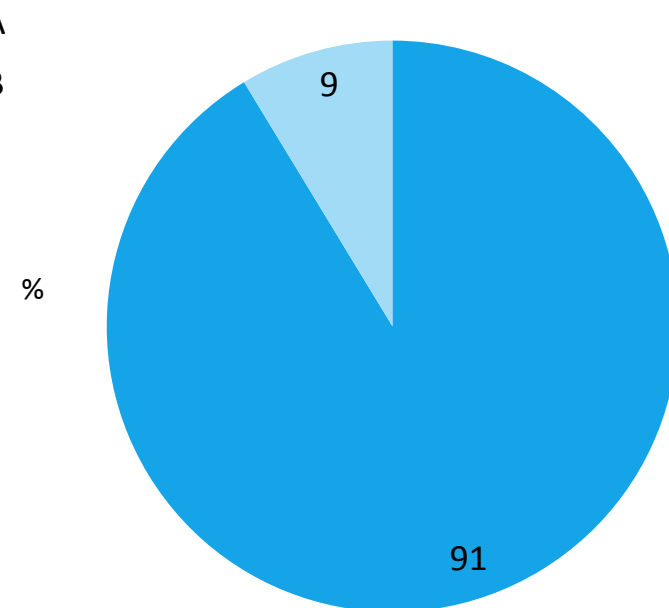
## Community

The overall results, after asking those who initially answered 'other' or 'don't know' to choose A or B, show nine in ten of the online survey respondents (91%) preferring the rate peg only Option A, compared with two in three in the telephone survey (65%).

**Telephone**



**Online**



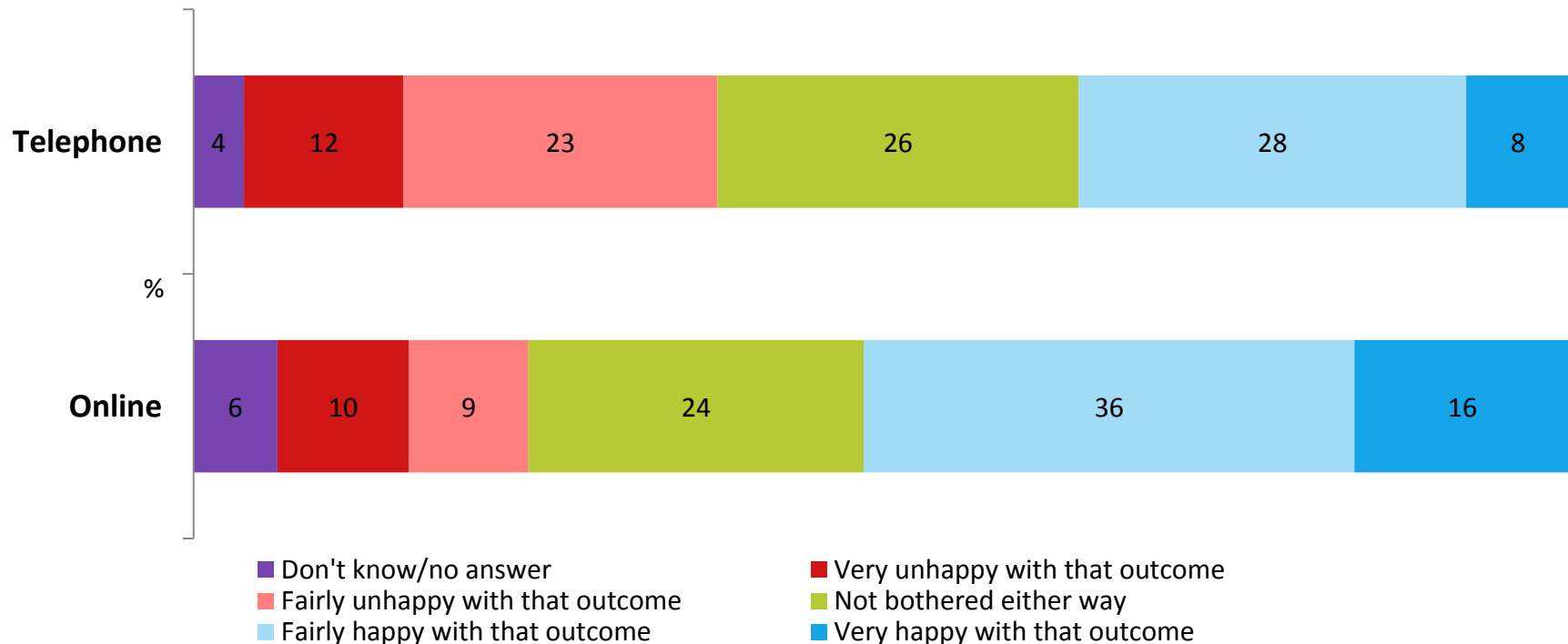
**QC2/3.** If acting responsibly, in the best interests of the whole community, which of these two options do you think Singleton Council should choose? Which of the two options would you prefer Singleton Council to choose?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Reaction if Council chose Option A

## Community

A majority of those completing the online survey (52%) say they would be happy if Singleton Council chose Option A, compared with just one in three (36%) of the residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey.



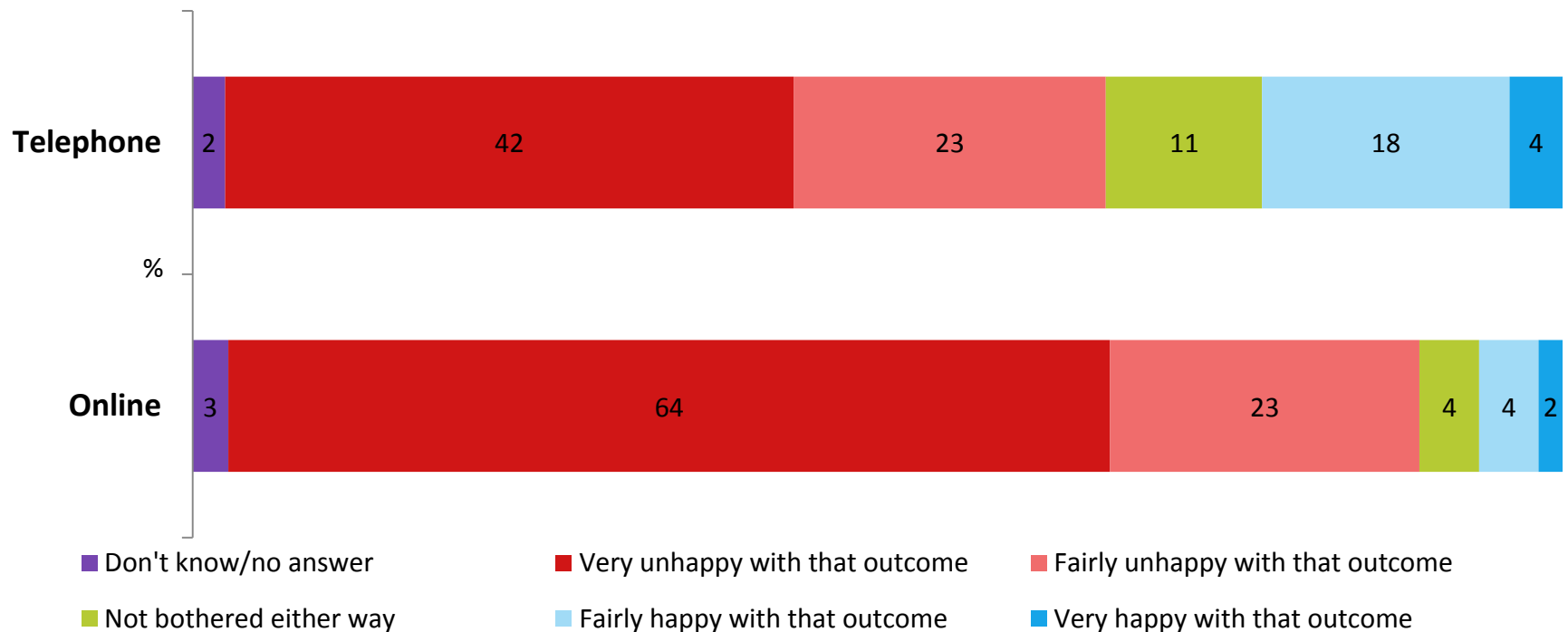
**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A (rates only increasing by the annual rate peg, around 2.5% per annum, Singleton Council not having enough resources to renew and maintain local assets, having to change, reduce or no longer provide some services) how would you react?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# Reaction if Council chose Option B

## Community

Among residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey, a majority (65%) said they would be unhappy if Singleton Council chose Option B, with 42% very unhappy. Among those completing the online survey, these figures are much higher – 87% unhappy including 64% very unhappy.



**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B (a 9.75% rate increase for each of the next 4 years, including the annual rate peg of around 2.5% per annum, an increase in general rates over the 4 years of 35-40%, with Singleton Council continuing to provide the current level and range of services, carry out maintenance and renew assets) how would you react?

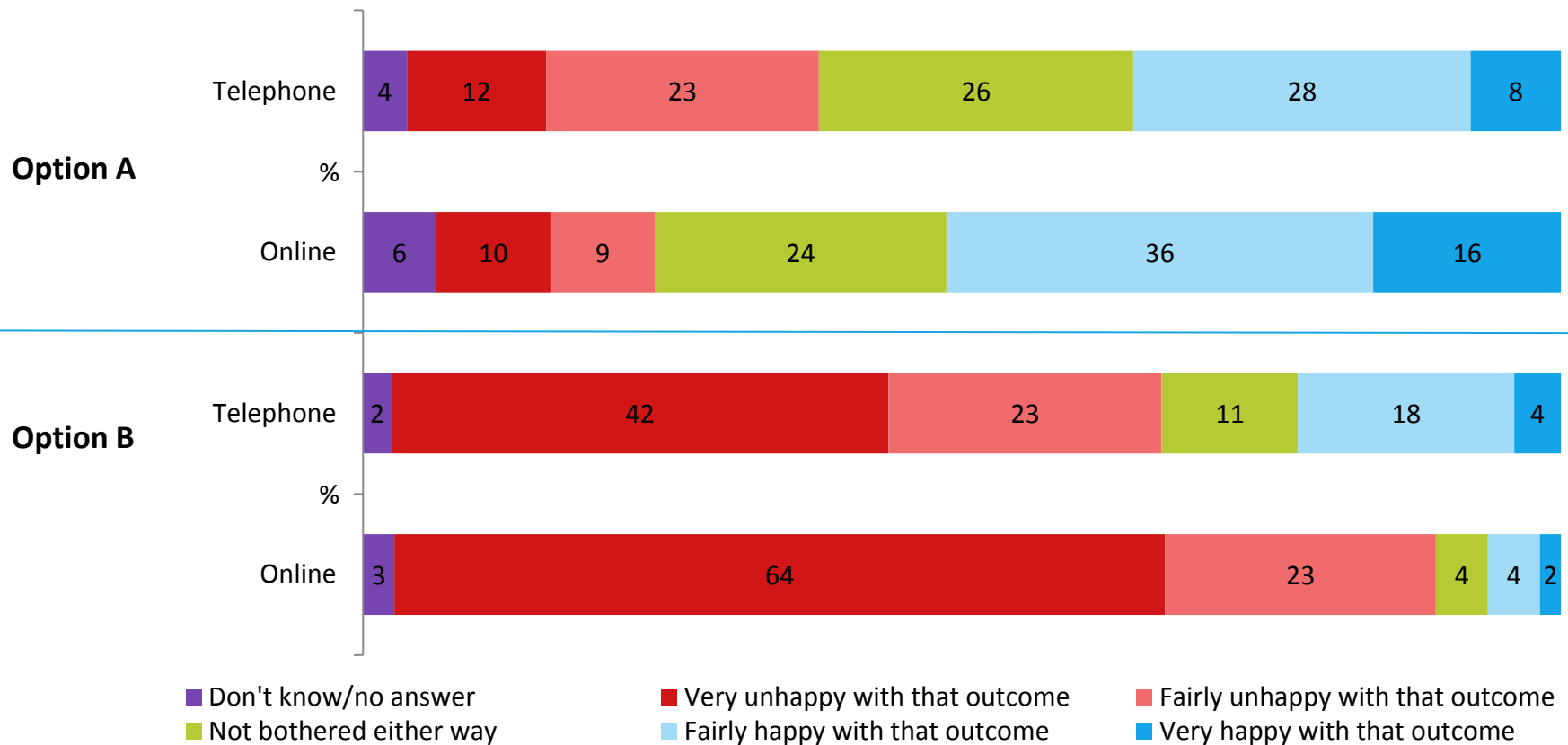
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



# Comparative reactions for Option A and Option B

## Community

The chart below shows the results for reactions to a decision to choose Option A or Option B among residential ratepayers taking part in the telephone survey and those completing the online survey.



**QC4.** If Singleton Council chose Option A ...how would you react?

**QC5.** If Singleton Council decided to pursue Option B ...how would you react?

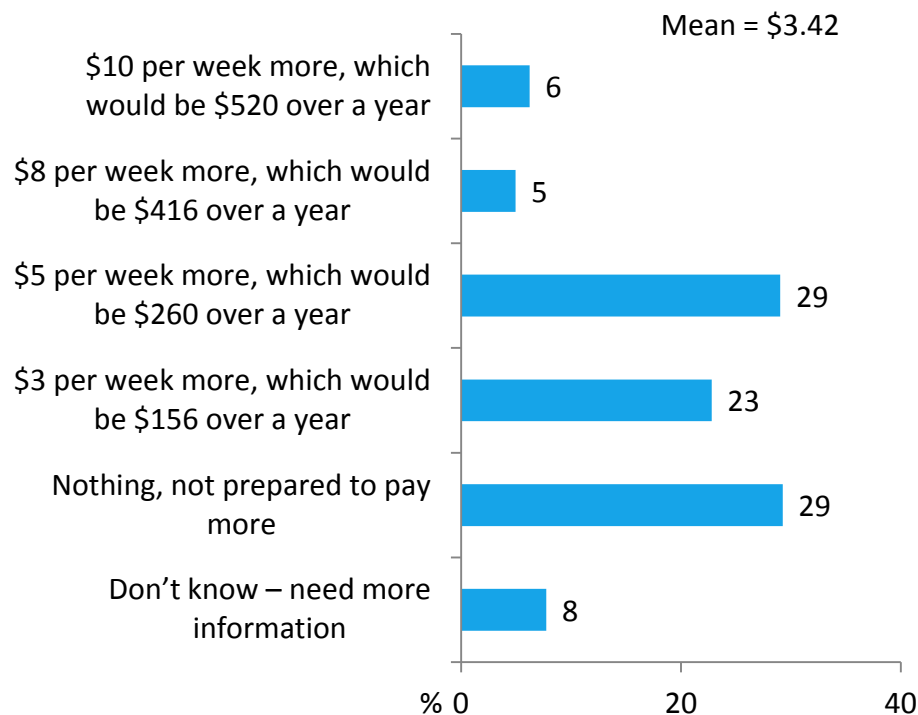
**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.

# How much prepared to pay to maintain services

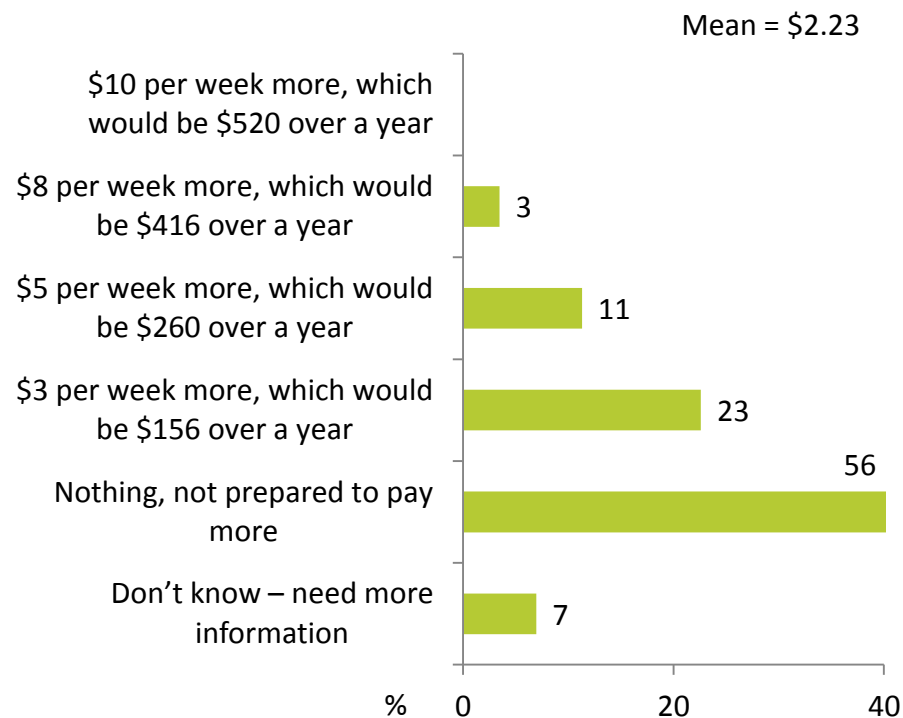
## Community

A majority of those completing the online survey (56%) are not prepared to pay anything more in rates to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level. This is almost twice as high as in the telephone survey (29%). The mean amount prepared to pay is also much lower - \$2.23 per week, compared with \$3.42.

**Telephone**



**Online**



**QC6.** How much more in Council rates, if anything, would you be prepared to pay to maintain local facilities and services at a satisfactory level?

**Base:** Residential ratepayers: 465 telephone interviews, 115 online survey completes.



# instinct<sup>and</sup>reason

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## **SINGLETON COUNCIL SRV RESEARCH**

### **FOLLOW UP QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

This document summarises the results from qualitative research to follow up the quantitative surveys of ratepayers.

#### **Background and objectives**

The follow up qualitative research was designed to help fully understand the views of ratepayers being expressed in the surveys, and to gain greater insight into ratepayers' perspectives on the relevant issues.

The intention was to probe further on the explicit issues of options for rate increases, asset renewal and service levels; and also to better understand the context behind views being expressed.

#### **Methodology**

We followed up more than 50 of the survey respondents to clarify certain answers, and to 'recruit' for more in-depth research.

20 respondents were invited to take part in the online forum, with a mix by their responses in the survey – preference for Option A or Option B, current rates paid, income, home location, age and gender. 11 of those 20 were active participants throughout, providing context, giving their views on the key issues, and explaining the reasons behind their views.

We also carried out 6 in-depth telephone interviews lasting around 30 minutes each.

#### **Main conclusions after follow up qualitative research**

The follow up qualitative research confirms that there is a lot of resistance to the proposition of a 9.75% per annum increase for the next 4 years. Ratepayers do not feel it is justified or affordable or both. This opposition is strong, passionate, and based on deeply held beliefs about what they should pay and how Singleton Council operates, not just superficial, reactive opinions.

Even after reading all of the information provided by Council, ratepayers tend not to be persuaded by the case. They tend to conclude that an increase of 4, 5 or maybe 6% per annum, perhaps for an extended period of more than 4 years, would be more reasonable and realistic, although some even baulk at this.

It is fair to say that views are being expressed in a negative and often cynical context. This leads to comments such as *“Singleton Council will do what it wants no matter what we say”* and *“They probably deliberately set out to scare us with that 9.75% and always intended to go for the 5 or 6%”*.

Based on the survey results and the follow-up qualitative research, there is no doubt that if Singleton Council were to press ahead with the Programmed option (Option B in our research) with the 9.75% pa rate increase, there would be high levels of dissatisfaction among ratepayers.

If Singleton Council now announced that it was seeking a lower level of SRV, there would at least be an acknowledgement of it ‘listening to ratepayers’. Council could announce that it has looked at the hard financial analysis (suggesting 9.75% pa for 4 years), listened to ratepayers’ concerns, and proposed a final rate increase of X% with the deficit to be made from a combination of efficiency savings, shared service initiatives, innovation initiatives, and – where necessary – some cuts to services.

The big question of course is what that figure X should be. The lower the figure, the lower would be the level and/or strength of dissatisfaction with what is seen as an unjustified and/or unaffordable increase. Hence the suggestion by ratepayers of a figure of 4, 5 or at most 6%.

However, there is also a credibility issue to consider given that Council has publicly stated 9.75% per annum for 4 years is what is needed with little scope to cut services, so a final increase of 7 or 8% would have more credibility than 4-6%.

## **Reasoning behind ratepayers views**

### **Context**

Consistent with the survey results, ratepayers often think that they do not benefit much from Council services and facilities, that they do not get good value from what they currently pay in rates, that rates in Singleton are high, and that the money Singleton Council currently has (or has access to) is not well used. This creates the conditions for later comments resisting the suggestion of a 9.75% per annum rate increase for the next 4 years. In addition, many ratepayers do not feel they can afford the increase or should have to face such a large increase at a time when they are ‘doing it tough’.

Here are some examples of the comments of ratepayers who are critical of Singleton Council:

*“My rates were increasing at a slow rate in line with cost of living increase for about 10 years from 2000. As I approach retirement age they appear to be increasing at an alarming rate.. which I find quite frightening! Will I be forced to move in order to afford to live? It seems to be the way the economy/politics is going! The services I get are not changing...just getting more expensive. Many other councils offer a reduction in rates for seniors or pensioners, not so in Singleton! Perhaps it is something they should consider if they are going to increase our rates”.*

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*"The only services that have changed in Singleton over the last 10yrs is a few roads, update of reddenberry bridge, the library, the main street, the mall, a bigger tafe and a pretty set of traffic lights + an upcoming new swim n gym - i'm sorry but compared to other towns of similar setups (like moranbah, port hedland, even dubbo), our council is lagging behind in planning and prioritisation; they act on their own accord and spend money on things that add little value to the community, leaving bigger projects to be ignored or completed cheaply with poor workmanship.*

*In a nutshell, for what services we have they are good but maintenance and renewal must be poor based off the need for an increase - as they are yet to answer the basic question of without the push from the gov where would we be?*

*What has caused the unsustainable gap; singleton has a rich economy yet they fail to explain why they need more money; i.e is it because ppl are spending out of town because of poor hours or excessive prices. I think more communication is required; yes we need more investment but it needs to be wise, the value for our rates is terrible compared to what other towns get and far too high for the value given in the last 10yrs".*

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*"I believe that the services provided are basic. They upgraded the recycling centre at the tip but I wonder how well this will be patronised and was this facility something that rate payers actually wanted. From reading on community facebook groups, most people wanted a 3rd bin for green waste.*

*I know Singleton Council have a Sports Council that meet? monthly, but it seems that little money is actually spent by council on maintaining or upgrading our beautiful sports facilities. Many improvements are achieved via government grants, sponsorship from mining companies and fundraising by local clubs. As shown by the recent fundraising by Singleton Netball for a new clubhouse. Alroy Oval, for example, has no permanent shade available. This oval is used extensively for athletics, athletics carnivals, cricket and soccer. The new disability access path at Alroy was not fully funded by council but half was through private / government sponsorship. Sport is a huge part of the lives of many young people in Singleton and as we have little other to offer young children and teenagers we should be investing in these areas.*

*I admit that I do not know much about the maintenance and renewal of local assets, but they do not do any weed spraying or aerating at Alroy Oval. This ground is very hard and considering the amount of use it gets it should be better maintained. Gardiner Circuit was resurfaced 2014 or 2103, there seemed to be no need for this, I felt it was a waste of money.*

*The new library was a great addition to the Singleton community but that was many years ago".*

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*"I think I get a basic service for the rates I pay now. An increase of 9% each year for 4 years is unwarranted considering that services will not be improved or increased. But simply put money into the bank to show the Government that Singleton has money in the bank.*

*Singleton Council has provided evidence that the rates we pay are good or low compared to other councils of a similar size. But Singleton Council also get a lot of money from the mining companies... example 10 million from MTW. So what does the council do with this money on top of the rates paid?"*

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*"I would like to support Margaret in saying that those who live in Branxton and pay rates to Singleton received very little local benefit. I would also agree that the Library and local parks are maintained and well used by the community.*

*The upgrade to the main street does not seem to have changed the main street significantly enough, apart from the bright red poles, to have warranted the huge cost to the community.*

*I can only speak from my experience and where I live in Branxton and say that my usage of services is very minimal. I do see a council supporting community engagement and aware and reasonably responsive to the need for improved services for health and lifestyle. This is only related to the Singleton town centre with very little focus on villages and rural residential areas.*

*I feel there should be increased services/community facilities for the rural residential areas considering their rates are the highest and benefit is the lowest. Therefore I would say that value for money is poor.*

*A week ago we received an information booklet from Singleton Council about securing the future. Council pointed out that mining contribution is 35% of rate income, therefore we are supposedly better off on average than other councils.*

*According to this information sheet, Residential Rural Residential category pays the highest rates of any other category at \$1,125.82 (2015/16). My rates were in excess of this by \$500 for 2014/15 year, with very little value for my money. Very concerned at what I will pay in 2015/16 year. Therefore I would say my rates are high compared to other LGA's".*

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*"Singleton Council services are good when run by Contractors eg garbage collection and recycling. However, they don't want to know about their trees on the footpath that are blocking storm water drains. Twice I had to pay a plumber to unblock drains (cost \$700).*

*Building inspections are questionable. We had a problem with a neighbour's illegal extensions causing our shed to be flooded. I contacted Council twice. The inspector came and looked at the problem and did nothing. The problem was finally solved when a new tenant moved in and made the necessary repairs".*

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*"Services and facilities are generally good.*

*In regard to maintenance and renewal.....do Council ever go and look at Glass Parade and its adjoining street? It winds in and out of trees and the condition of the road surface indicates that ground testing was never done. They blame the Contractors, but Council must have approved the design and inspected the job before it was signed off.*

*Value for rates paid is no more or less than what Council should provide.*

*Council's income is not solely dependent on Rates and since Singleton Council benefits from significant contributions made by mines in the area, their rates should be on a par or lower than elsewhere".*

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Even those ratepayers who are more positive about Singleton Council, there is still underlying resistance to paying significantly more:

*"I believe the services are fairly good. The streets are always clean, our bins get emptied promptly and if there is a change to bin day due to public holidays, they always let you know through the mail. I like the Council clean up day and as mentioned before, love using the parks and the bike paths.*

*I think the services that are provided are appropriate and fail to see why they are spending such a massive amount on upgrading the gym and the main street (which does not suit the town) and crippled local businesses? The library is one of my favourite places to go with the kids on a weekend and is the best library around. It is nice to see the occasional family day (movies in the park) and it would be lovely to see more of this kind of thing. The services such as ANZAC Day and Carols night are also wonderful.*



*I think maintenance is obviously very important! Council does do a great job of maintaining park lands but the roads are something of a hit and miss. 6 months ago, Council spent money re-lining Wattle Ponds Road and then turned around and re-tarred it recently so it was a little bit of a silly endeavour. The major thoroughfare to Hunterview (Glass Parade) is an absolute joke and I am sure, ruining a lot of cars that have to use this road to get to and from home every day. I do not believe more money is needed, I think Council has to re-evaluate the priority list and use the money provided more carefully.*

*In terms of rates going up, I think last year, we were contacted to see if we would be willing to pay a little extra to maintain country roads, which we chose to do. I strongly believe that asking us to pay an extra 9% each year for the next 4 years is completely wrong. In the past, it has been comparative to pay increases which has been fine, but to increase it by 53% is absolutely absurd. It will push people away from this area who cannot afford this, especially with the mine downturn at the moment. I fail to see why they need to increase it at such an alarming rate???? At the moment, I think Singleton Rates are reasonable and do compare to other townships but what they are asking rate payers to do is ridiculous. Imagine asking for this sort of pay rise?*

*In conclusion, Singleton Council are currently doing a terrific job. I do not think extra rates would be utilised appropriately or even believe they are necessary unless they can show us, where that extra money would be going. 2.5% is reasonable and comparative to pay increases. 10% is disgusting!".*

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*"I would say services are at a reasonable standard.*

*The range of services varies between organisations depending on government grants and generally the rest is up to volunteers.*

*Asset maintenance is a huge cost e.g. the swim and gym. Private gym operators seem to thrive though. Is there a message there?*

*Value for rates is average as it varies hugely between activities*

*Price wise rates here in recent times have been favourable but a 53% rise over four years is outrageous.*

*\*I cannot complain about the quality of the council services I receive ie use of the library, roads, garbage collection however when comparing it with other councils I can see where council money has been spent in a manner that perhaps does not extend to the wider diverse needs of the community. They have a good senior citizens centre but how about concentrating on improving facilities for the young teenagers.*

*\*if money is wisely invested then it is an obvious way to improving finances so it makes good sense to maintain their assets appropriately but I would like to know what they are. They have sold a lot of land and subdivided it over the past years, is there more land? What are their assets?*

*\*as an owner of a building in the Main Street we pay cleaning rates as well as land and water rates. Add this together and we get little value for what we pay for. As I live out of the town of singleton we get a garbage service every 2 weeks and a voucher for a 1 off extra trip to the dump. Personally I am happy with the amount we pay for the services we use and we would be unhappy to see an increase in rates.*

*\*the only areas I can compare rates with are a small town in the north west region of NSW, Maitland and Wollongong and in comparison for what we get for what we pay for we are no better than them nor any worse".*

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*"I believe the services Singleton Council provides, simply based on those that both myself and my family utilise and (as a whole being non specific), are of good quality and reliability.*

*I find the range of services extensive but I cannot condone all services provided. I do not want to upset anyone by mentioning my biggest bug bears as this is just my opinion. However I believe over many years of local government governance there have been many mistakes made and political agendas pursued that has confused the real issue of what exactly local government is or should be about and what their focus areas should be.*

*The answer to this question is predetermined by the decisions made by council and is directly influenced by those decisions council make as to the extraneous services they have decided to provide and the extent of the provision of the service and facilities required to effectively facilitate the "added" service. I believe It is becoming self evident that this council has become that burdened with increasing assets/services that they can no longer maintain all their assets/services either efficiently or fiscally.*

*To the fourth question I would say some definitely deliver value for money while others simply do cut it in any way shape or form.*

*We are told by this council we have one of the lowest rate fee indexes of any local government. Unfortunately these surveys I believe tend to lump a lot of information together and are non specific pieces of propaganda and misinformation for many reasons.*

*Funnily enough I work with many people who do not live locally and who pay similar if not less for similar size blocks as we do in Singleton. So my short answer is no Singleton rates are excessive for the location, zoning and size of land allotments".*

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*"My overall response to these questions regarding services, charges and maintenance of council owned assets and council run facilities is that we are being over serviced. For a long time council/s have gone way beyond what is responsible and sustainable provision of services within their communities. It has led, especially in Singleton, due to the compulsory infrastructure revenue derived from coal mining, to an increasingly unsustainable growth of services and facilities, many of which (just in my opinion) are services local government should not even consider providing as they tend to be short lived assets that become long term burdens and that inevitably never come close to redeeming their costs of operation. Similar could be said of the extra jobs created within councils over years that are required to manage and provide said facilities and services.*

*I personally believe there is only so many services councils can provide and even less that they are compelled to provide. However as I keep saying this council like many others now provide services and facilities that in reality having nothing to do with local government.*

*Everyone it seems both politically and socially has their own barrow to push and wants local government to step up and make it happen. I don't agree with this mindset. Councils need to get back to basics and community interest groups need to do both their homework and maths while at the same time asking themselves is this a service council should/need or are morally compelled to provide. Is it sustainable, is requesting council to burden the cost unrealistic and hurting others in the community.*

*Cities and bigger rural urban centres flourish due to a their scale of economies by comparison, this is one of the advantages of amalgamation and reduction in overheads, not that I am condoning amalgamation but quite simply it does have its advantages.*

*We cannot however continue to press councils for better or more diverse services as it is obvious this council cannot afford it. When do we/they have to say enough is enough. Unfortunately it would seem and this no different anywhere that to stay in power you need to appease your constituents. We need stronger more down to earth, forthright leadership from our local Councillors and council management. Otherwise anyone and I mean anyone can balance a budget by increasing fees and charges and imposing them on a captive collective".*

## Explicit reasons given for resisting Option B

Here are examples of the comments made when asked to support Option A or Option B and explain why:

*"There needs to be an option c instead of the council trying to push either u pay more money or you're going to lose services. Maybe they need a bit of a reshuffle internally like nearly all other businesses at the moment, be careful with what money they do have and not waste it. Surely if they are so far behind in the money for services they have obviously spent money they don't have. Perhaps they could talk with other councils about what they have done and are doing to achieve their goals and I don't mean a full funded trip up or down the coast at the rate payers expense either".*

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*"Pressed to choose it would be option A in which it states that council would not have the funds to function even though they have a 60 million dollar investment fund available which would allow a hard working GM to set the ship on a sustainable course .*

*An option somewhere between A and B should be the aim for council".*

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*"Option A if i had to choose; but i definitely do not feel informed - option B lacks clear definition of where this extra \$ would be used; i would expect a minimum 4 year plan of projects that would reflect the wise use of the budget, with key focus on prioritisation and value to the community + clear cuts to council wages & wastage.*

*Without a clear budget, option B will turn this town into a ghost town - to be honest any planner could come up with a better strategy and if this rate rise went into a decent newspaper Singleton Council would come under some harsh scrutiny; it's simply appalling".*

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*"Some valid points have already been stated by others. I agree with Stuart's point of view. Why not give a third option instead of force people to pay so much more? I believe there needs to be some middle ground. I feel that 4 to 5% would be more than enough and affordable. As far as the Council goes, I think they should support the option that the people of Singleton believes is fair.*

*I would also like to know what services they would be considering cutting if we were to only pay 2.5%? I feel that the Council has obviously overspent and is now trying to make the community pay for their mistakes.*

*I think that the overpriced tip fees have led to people dumping illegally or going to other shires, taking money away from the township. It will also push people to buy in other areas and not increase the population which would lead to more rates to cover the extra costs.*

*I do not feel well informed about anything. It has not been stated what the extra costs will be or the services which they will cut. All that has been provided to me is a figure and the comment about cutting services. To make a decision about something that will affect so many, I need to have access to budgets and spending to understand the nature of the problem.*

*I also think that 53% for businesses may be alright for businesses succeeding but I know with the shut down of the main street for over 12 months, they lost a lot of revenue which they are still trying to recoup. There is also a massive mine down turn which means people have less to spend. Fair? I do not believe so!*

*I understand Council needs to have funds to make things happen in this town. I would really like a breakdown of the costs and reasons for why the expenditure is going to be so much higher. There has to be a middle ground".*

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*"If I had to make a choice between only these two options, I would choose Option A because in the current economic climate people cannot afford Option B. Businesses in town have not yet recovered from the John Street debacle so Council should forget Option B.*

*I could not agree more with Carol's comment about Lake St Clair. Not only is it a terribly neglected asset, but it is also a missed opportunity for our cash strapped Council to earn a bit more income.*

*I do not feel at all informed about these options. What are the services that would be reduced, changed or cancelled?*

*I would like Council to give ratepayers another option. "Give us more money or we'll reduce services" shows a degree of arrogance and contempt for ratepayers".*

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*"Option A at this stage.*

*This issue is far from black and white despite council's information booklet and self analysis which is also a concern. Also very rarely and without exception I would suggest, do companies who provide services to councils to assess performance, productivity etc find adversely of their employer. I ask are they able to or do they have the means for forensic analysis of the performance of council/s or do they rely heavily on being provided with information by council itself.*

*I get annoyed at being told we have comparatively cheap rates. Comparative to what? I know my rates are cheaper say than for a similar property on the central coast or mid north coast but how do you compare areas when the demographics and needs of communities can differ so much? What is the basis for comparison and how in depth is it?*

*Does it take into consideration the millions of dollars Singleton Council receive from mining companies each year or initially in compulsory infrastructure funds, does it consider or include the extra donations and support they receive in funds at a community level from mining companies. Do they analyse the council's business model and score it equitably across the board with other local government areas and, if they do, show me how they do it and how they come to their results. But please do not shove anecdotal verbiage down my throat. Prove to me what they are claiming otherwise to me it is misinformation which council have an aptitude for. How is it scored so as we are comparing apples with apples?*

*This Council is lucky it doesn't have to manage sea walls, piers, jetties, tidal areas, beaches, foreshores etc and a myriad of other natural challenges in their everyday management of this area. They have had real difficulty in coming to some decent development plan for Lake St. Clair, and I would be interested to know if they sought the advice of councils experienced in these areas. I am sure they would have but are they listening.*

*In short I think the information to support their argument is non specific verbiage with no specific explanation of the mechanics of how they draw their comparison and how it is correlated. I believe this council has become lazy, overgrown and lost sight of the true function of a council due to the influx of mining dollars into their coffers over many years. I believe both the community and council have been spoilt by this sense of privilege and entitlement.*

*Surely it is not up to council to score itself and provide alternatives. Couldn't we have a totally independent and thorough forensic investigation that does some real time comparisons and provides recommendations of scientific modelling?"*

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## **Does the information help? What impact does it have?**

After encouraging ratepayers to read the information booklet, views did not tend to shift towards Option B, and in some cases they firmed against it, with a common view being that the final outcome should be an increase higher than the rate peg but less than the 9.75% in Option B. Also, comments on the information provided by Singleton Council tended to be negative, partly because it read as a 'fait accompli' and partly because it was 'trying to sell' an unpalatable proposition:

*"What is clear?" Council had enough money until now to provide services.*

*What is not clear? Why they've discovered they will need such a massive rate increase over the next four years.*

*What is helpful? Council is now asking ratepayers for input. (But will they listen? This did not happen for the Streetscape or Dunolly Road.)*

*What is not helpful? To keep comparing our rates with other councils. Most other councils don't have the extra income provided by mines.*

*What is missing? A list of services Council provides and some indicator of what would be cut from these services if Option B was not accepted.*

*What I believe? That Council is sure that Option B will be approved.*

*What I don't believe? That ratepayers will support it.*

*What reassures me? The State Government is assessing the performance of all local councils.*

*What annoys me? Council's "get lost" attitude when I contact them either by phone or in person and their self praise and regular "photo shoots" by the GM and Mayor in the local paper".*

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*"I agree with Bill, confused as to why we are but we aren't "Fit for the Future" unless Council increase land rates by 36% over the next for years.*

*The information booklet while I would not argue it is contrived however it provides little other than scaremongering and alluding to the preferences of Singleton Council.*

*Statistical information can be manipulated. Statements can be made without verification as can comparisons.*

*Misinformation or disinformation?*

*I am not convinced simply because "IPART" has had its 5 cents worth. QUANGO....mmmm.*

*Council claim they have made changes to save \$1M in wages and on costs. Can we have this mini budget published please.*

*Council have changed their fleet operations. Suddenly after years of being told that when they turn them over quickly (40 000km) they actually make money on the "trade in" now they are going to retain vehicles for an extra 3 years? So surely they will lose money now on the trade ins? Won't this decision actually cost more or was the previous bit of information once again misinformation or simply not true. Smaller cars, smaller fleet that would save money but wouldn't assuage egos nor indicate individuals standing in the corporate ladder. Sorry very cynical about that claimed saving. Might save on fuel too if more Senior Management actually lived in Singleton".*

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*"At this point, after delving into rate increases that I have experienced over the last 2 rate periods (2013/14 and 2014/15) where my rates have increased by 20%, I am concerned at the motive to consult now and not with previous rises? I noted in the booklet that there was a one off variation in 2014 of 5%.*

*I have read through the above comments and would have to say that I agree that we are making a decision based on insufficient information.*

#### Booklet feedback

- *I found the booklet useful and informative and prompted me to look at what I am currently being charged, which is much higher than the average.*
- *I found the "what have we achieved in the past 4 years", very long and perhaps would have been better to understand expenditure as part of a financial statement.*
- *For the average person, the table on page 3 was full of financial council jargon.*
- *The average person would have found the booklet to be over the top and possibly not have read it. It is often a small minority that take the time to read information presented in this manner.*
- *I appreciate the attempt to bring this together and can see some valid points amongst challenges.*

*Simply put, I am going for Option A as I have already been slugged with much more than 9.5% over 2 years and don't feel it necessary to pay any more. I possibly am disgruntled that I have experienced increases without consultation.*



*Of course council will have to demonstrate that the community were adequately consulted to inform the rate increase decision”.*

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*“1. What services would they reduce? I don't think any as they already only provide the very basics and it has been shown that with the combination of the contribution from the mines and the rates they already receive and the assets they have why isn't this enough for the future.*

*2 I don't feel well informed as to how the money is divided between these services, would it help if all rate payers were actually given access to the budget and to the monthly financial statement?*

*3 I agree with many of the comments as to will they really take into account what we say or will it be like the streetscape and just do what they want and dismiss our comments as irrelevant? Will the comments be published for others to read? What comments will they say at the meeting about the survey? Or is this another waste of rate payers money?*

*4 if they opt for option B then a reduction in rates should be given to pensioners and seniors as they will not be receiving any increase in wages as will many of the council employees!*

*In summary, I do not support an increase in rates but prefer option A BUT if they close any of the services I would really like to know what services they would close?*

*5. Can anyone please tell me why we need an upgrade of Ryan ave? Who was asked and of what benefit will it be to us?”.*

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*“Personally I support Option A. It would be difficult to reduce services but, given that many families and businesses have had to cut back in these leaner times, I believe that council should be no different. Again personally my family uses little of council services other than the basics.*

*Singleton Council obviously supports / wants option B as promoted in their glossy brochure. They outline the various reasons to support their claim and it all looks very nicely presented. Of course they are not going to point out their failings in financial management and budgeting. It would be good if they outlined what services would be reduced or cut.*

*I would like to know how much council spend on various community events such as Pictures in the Park and the upcoming Christmas in John Street. These are very 'feel good' community events and may help promote local business but at what cost to ratepayers? Local residents who rent do not pay rates but get the benefit of these events / services.*

*I have read the brochure and council's explanation but still feel not fully informed as it is only council's version and obviously appears very persuasive. As suggested previously, an outside audit may be more revealing on where council spends money unnecessarily or where cut backs could be made.*

*Council receives 35% of its income from the mines so why / how can they justify this increase while at the same time say our rates are comparable to other similar councils. Where does all this income go?*

*The brochure is perhaps slightly misleading when listing their accomplishments, with many developments achieved through grants and sponsorship, again self-promotion. Example - the new sale yards and John Street. I totally disagree with council spending / providing free compost bins to the tune of \$1579 and the recent free money to homeowners to get their chimneys cleaned. Surely these costs should be borne by the homeowners. I do not have a chimney so why are my rates subsidising those that do.*

*What annoys me is that council will go to all this trouble (and cost) of getting our feedback through this discussion and the survey but they will still go ahead and do as they please even if the majority of ratepayers are against this rate increase.*

*On further investigation my rates have increased by 10.3% over the last 2 years but my cost per KL of water has gone up 22%".*

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### **Where cuts could be made? And what prepared to pay?**

Those ratepayers participating in the qualitative research were asked to identify services that could be cut but this is also unpalatable, and the prevalent view was that Singleton Council needs to present options for cuts to ratepayers for a meaningful comment. They were also asked to give a concluding comment on what they would be prepared to pay:

*"Q1. If reductions need to be made, such things as the australia day celebration & Christmas celebrations could be scaled down. Let organisations such as rotary, lions etc take charge as it once was.*

*How much of the budget goes into cars and petrol for council workers? Cars should not be a part of rate payers money.*

*The current program for schools, ie the recycling program and the officers, I don't see value for money there. The program for recycling is a part of the school curriculum and is taught without them coming, it is good but not necessary. Providing green bins and compost bins could go. If people are interested in composting they do it without council intervention.*

*The road side pick up could be abolished. A suggestion could be that on an allocated day if you have extra rubbish to dump then you take it to the waste centre for free, ie no contractor paid to do the job.*

*Some organisations that receive grants should be given help in applying for grants through other organisations eg the other day a well known Australian author visited the singleton library, I am uncertain of the cost but only a handful of people attended, who knew about it? I enjoyed it but a lot of money I would assume for only a few fans.*

*Mines should be asked to pay a lot more towards council costs after all they are the main reason for damage to the environment and our health.*

*Q2 if the rates really needed to be adjusted I think 5% not 9.2% but then I still believe that those who are pensioners or seniors should stay at the current rate.*

*Q3 I would like to have the opportunity to view council's budget and expenditure at the end of a financial year. I think it should be published and made available for anyone to see and ask questions before it is approved".*

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*"I am hoping that Singleton Council applied to IPART for the 9.75% increase, which is a very large amount, and have their fingers crossed to get approved for a smaller increase of around 5 to 6%. Surely they realise that in the current climate, and considering the recent refusal for the Drayton South expansion that families, pensioners and working families are struggling.*

*Council does need to rein in its spending, the township, families and businesses are suffering enough without this burden. Get rid of the free compost bins, chimney cleaning rebates, reduce spending on community events such as Pictures in the Park. How much does it cost for the council to enter the Tidy Towns competition?*

*Notes on question 2. Singleton Council have outlined quite clearly why they want the rate increase, it is an easy option for them instead of looking at reducing services or better financial management. It is a lazy option, taken without consideration or respect for the ratepayers of Singleton.*

*Notes on question 3. A rate rise of between 4 to 6% would be better accepted by people".*

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*"Q1. I am sure massive cuts at administration levels could be made (just wishing). Cannot add much to Billy R's list.*

*Q2. Council mandarins acted as superiors with lopsided options meant to bamboozle mere ratepayers. It could not have put their case for option B more effectively.*

*Q3. Rises should be linked to CPI but I agree a 5% rise to compensate for the mining downturn with low income compensation".*

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*"Q1 - Council has not even thought about going with Option A but they need to consider the possibility that they are not going to get the unreasonable rate increase in Option B. At this stage they have not given a list of services currently provided and without this it is difficult to suggest which could be cut or reduced.*

*Q2 - I think getting community support for Option B would be almost impossible. I also think that IPART would look at it the same as ratepayers. Looking at the Government indicators, Council has only passed two of the seven benchmarks and it looks like they need a heap of money to get them out of this mess. Has this desperate need for more money from ratepayers been building up for some time or has it happened on the watch of the present council?*

*Q3 - I don't think Council was being serious when asking for 9.75% increase. They knew this would not be accepted and thought the community would be very grateful if they dropped it back to about 5%.*

*\* I hope that when Council does its Ability to Pay analysis it will discover that some people simply don't have the ability to pay extra.*

*\* Council is very cautious about providing any information. Getting ratepayers onside will be difficult while they are treated with a "Them/Us" attitude. When I asked about what machinery (dozers etc) Council had, I was told I would have to request this information in writing to the GM".*

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*"Q1 could probably cut things like the upgrades of items that are still in good condition and that are more than good enough. Services like rework because of poor planning.*

*Q2 if the people in the community had more faith in the council maybe we would be more willing to take on a higher percentage rise. But when the quality of work like the Main Street is occurring and when the rate payers views are not being listened to (and understand that's part of this discussion forum, but if they take nothing out of it we are wasting our time) then I can't see that anyone will be keen on accepting the increase.*

*Q3 simple answer is none. Why would I bust my backside to come up with more money for a council that won't even try to help itself and think that the magic answer is to throw more money at it and keep spending more than they have. I hope they don't have credit cards".*

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*"Q1 - budget smarter not smaller; give ppl the extra green waste bins to reduce the need to spend extra \$\$ at the tip, rent council business like the heights sports out to alternative activities like private parties, sport or social clubs and look to use long term unemployed dole to perform cleaning & mowing, then scaling back wasteful "beautification" like xmas decorations, redoing roads that are still ok and extending asset depreciation strategies.*

*Q2 as myself and many before have said; clear budget plan with a 4 year project charter, detailing specific assets / projects & value, supported by a clear 10yr risk management strategy to ensure this type of gap never occurs again.*

*Q3 i think CPI to 5% is reasonable; but as everyone has already highlighted we don't think they will do this so i'm looking forward to them applying to a 3rd party with the excessive % to be told they need to take a hard look as to why 200 staff can't come up with a plan that won't turn the town into an empty dust bowl"*

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#### "Question One

*Some people have already shared some excellent ideas for if there were to be cut to services. Some other cuts could include:*

- *I know there is a proposal to upgrade Ryan Avenue but this is, I feel, unnecessary as it will cost millions of dollars to do. This road is completely fine and carries the traffic very well. Why are they thinking of upgrading something that is perfectly fine?*
- *I believe there is also money being thrown at putting a cycle way along Hermitage Rd, which again, is a massive cost.*
- *Maybe do a fortnightly collection of the red bin. I know in other areas, bins are half the size. My bin is hardly ever full after one week.*
- *Cuts to the number of workers in Council. (As stated before, a lot of people stand around watching other people work).*
- *A freeze on wage increases or a lesser rate.*
- *Without spending too much money, have a business improvement consultant analyse spending and budget in Singleton.*

### Question Two

*For this to be accepted by the community, Council would have to have an information night, pamphlets, facebook messages etc, outlining exactly what the money would be put into and explain why such a big increase is required? Provide the public with the benefits for this increase. Get them to understand what will happen if this option is not passed.*

### Question Three

*I believe 5% is more manageable for people in this area. This number has been mentioned many times but is not being considered".*

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*"Council has pointed out in its information booklet, as if it were suddenly enlightened, of some of the cost covering measures it has made and or intends to implement to reduce operational costs and overheads.*

*"HROC" has been part of council's resource pool for many years and was created with the intention of increasing local governments' purchasing powers, sharing resources, training facilities and costs etc and to basically reduce operational costs and overheads. Once again it is deliberately misleading to give the impression that this is a new cost saving innovation as it simply is not, under utilised perhaps and neglected but not new. Is the administrative cost of this local government "QUANGO" providing its intended returns and is it necessary to have its own offices and separate employees.*

*My bug bears on services.. definitely not intended to offend and definitely open to others opinions.*

*Councils in general have great difficulty in running commercial enterprises due to the ridiculous constraints at times due to the Local Government Act and their inability, it would seem, to lobby state government to allow greater flexibility when providing such services, eg Gym and Swim and Stock Yards. On a smaller scale the amount of funding and infrastructure that is provided to the Youth Centre, Library, Singleton Visitor and Information Centre . I also can't argue with Bill's suggestions with some savings measures*

*Council has its fingers in so many pies now and this has been without doubt due to public pressure and political point scoring over the years, that I personally feel the whole machine has got out of hand.*

*Will this change in the near or even foreseeable future are say for instance council run Art Galleries truly necessary? Involvement and assistance to some degree fine, but should they own and manage it. Wouldn't it be more prudent for it to be a co-operative as don't artists make money from their creations?*

*Rate pegging could be changed to at least cover inflation, however a special rate increase of 9.75% over 4 years is ridiculous. How did it ever get to this point with the wealth in this town? I believe like some council will ask for 9.75% but be happy with 4-5% pa and look at reapplying to get the term extended. At least that may make it more affordable in the short term.*

*It is interesting that "IPART" do not make recommendations or even the state government (and correct me if I am wrong) put direct incumbrances on councils to ensure their asset/services manifest remains proportionally sustainable with their income and ditto be applied to the size and cost of the bureaucracy employed to manage the local council.*

*Unfortunately this doesn't seem to happen and each year the machine gets bigger and heavier and more costly to run. If as a town we want to keep our current level of services then we will have to cop the rate hike. Amalgamation with (?) would not necessarily see improvements or better assets/services and maintenance it is just a likely to reduce services and increase our rates either way.*

*For all the wealth the mining boom has bought the Hunter region it has I believe created a false sense of security and a life to some extent of excess and entitlement. As mines close in the future this council will rely more and more heavily on rates/fees/charges to fund their operational costs.*

*My opinion is radically survey the services council provide, core and non core (more specifically), costs/income, put statutes in place to limit or put on hold further increases in services council provide and their assets then sit back and wait for the rates to increase anyway. (just being cynical).*

*But seriously I believe it all has to be put into a better perspective with better comparisons made and get back to basics without all the glitter and tinsel. However it doesn't seem to help when you get consecutive state governments that appear to be preoccupied with Sydney and its issues and not providing better guidance or governance of the performance of smaller rural local governments. Instead they have taken to weeding them out because it has all become too hard to address and too expensive to maintain. All this because they haven't been paying adequate attention to what has been happening in these communities and making sure local councils weren't overextending their resources.*

*Q1. Without proper figures on costs v income or statistical analysis on usage v \$capita can't really comment. Also comparisons on services (not essential rather non core) provided by other councils and the costs would help and probably make some choices self evident.*

*Q2. What I would like to know is with the millions of dollars mining companies contribute to this council's coffers each year how has this failed to prevent this council from overindulgence and left us with a "Russian roulette" type scenario.*

*How have other councils survived without these extraneous contributions to their bottom lines?*

*I just don't understand the disconnect between "fit for the future" options and the "contributions/rates" mines make to this council. Has it been the biggest contributor to issues council now face and if so has this money caused more issues (extraneous and gratuitous services) than it can afford to sustain?*

*I would like to see a full and detailed account of every dollar this council has received from mining companies and what this money has been used for over the past 20 years. Ditto for council jobs, pay increases, asset growth, services increase etc.*

*Q3. Obviously rate increases less than CPI is not acceptable. However neither is 9.75%. Every year council workers receive a CPI increase, have access to pay increase based on skills and bonuses based on performance. Unfortunately I don't, in fact I dropped \$20 000 over 15 months ago plus I don't get annual leave or sick leave despite working full time on shift. With the GST increase inevitable my wife (who is also casual) and I are in a situation where any major increase will mean further concern and hardship and it is not us that will suffer the consequences (as we don't need much) but our children who want and deserve the opportunity to play sport, go to Uni and even (god forbid) have their parents take them on an annual holiday.*

*Whether council like it or not (even or care) but with labour hire companies now "pimping" out workers to the mines, who have deliberately "re-gearred" their labour force (and grossly manifested the growth of this "full time" but paid part time phenomenon) then Singleton residents are going to hurt harder well in to the future. Economically I feel this town will feel the effects due to this lack of security so maybe council should look at hitting those mines with large casual employee numbers hard or at least take the fight to the State Government to address the inequality in pay and conditions and thereby better secure the economic future of this town. As it is if things don't change there is a real possibility I will have to sell up and move. If a 9.75% special rate increase goes through without a chance of a pay increase or full time employment then I will have no choice in the matter".*

*---CLOSE---*

15 December 2015