

Fit For the Future Community Engagement

Summary of Results

Appendix 5



2015



Contents

Contents	1
Introduction.....	2
Engagement Process.....	3
Councillor Involvement.....	5
Regional Collaboration	6
Reference Group	7
Community Consultation Meetings.....	11
Listening Posts	17
Surveys.....	18
Submissions	26
myGUYRA.com.....	31
Social Media	37
Information Provided	40
Media.....	45
Submission of Proposal.....	61

Introduction

Broad and effective consultation is required to engage the community in decisions made by Council. The level of community consultation should correspond to the potential level of community impact or concern, and should be tailored to the nature, complexity and impact of the issue, plan or policy. The Fit For the Future reform has the potential to have a dramatic impact on the Guyra Shire community, with the recommendation by the Independent Local Government Review Panel being that Guyra Shire and Armidale Dumaresq councils amalgamate. Past indicators had established a strong desire for the Guyra Shire to remain an autonomous local government authority however, given that Council's financial sustainability indicators projected a negative outlook, Council was required to discuss more effective and efficient ways of delivering services to the community in order to meet the Fit For the Future benchmarks.

In November 2014, Council prepared a Community Engagement Strategy to encourage active involvement and collaboration with the Guyra Shire community in developing the Fit For the Future submission. A key driving force for the Fit For the Future reforms, as identified by the NSW Government, was for communities to have confidence that their council is financially sound, operating efficiently and in a strong position to guide community growth and deliver quality services. The Guyra Shire Council took this opportunity to engage with the community to ascertain the community's needs and desires into the future.

Council endeavoured to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower the community through a variety of engagement methods. Each of the techniques employed by Council is explained in this document, along with the key findings and results of the engagement process. At its Council Meeting on 27 April 2015, Council resolved the following:

Moved Cr Vickery

Seconded Cr Murray

a) That Council make a submission to the Office of Local Government to become Fit For the Future by completing the Rural Council Proposal template, by 30 June 2015.

The Motion on being put to the vote was CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Moved Cr McArdle

Seconded Cr Heagney

a) That Council consults with the community, as per the community consultation timetable within this report, to develop key strategies that are acceptable to the community in becoming Fit For the Future.

b) That Council undertake a comprehensive review of its Integrated Planning and Reporting, including the Community Strategic Plan, Asset Management Plan, and Resourcing Strategy, over the next 12 months, in line with the Fit For the Future Reforms; and that the strategies developed in the Fit For the Future proposal be incorporated into the IPR.

c) That Council strongly object to any proposed boundary adjustments in Fit For the Future proposals by neighbouring Councils, Armidale Dumaresq, Glen Innes Severn, and Inverell Shire.

d) That Council oppose a merger recommended by Armidale Dumaresq Council, as proposed at their Ordinary Meeting of Council to be held on 27 April 2015, subject to boundary adjustments proposed by Glen Innes Severn Council and Inverell Shire Council.

The Motion on being put to the vote was CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Engagement Process



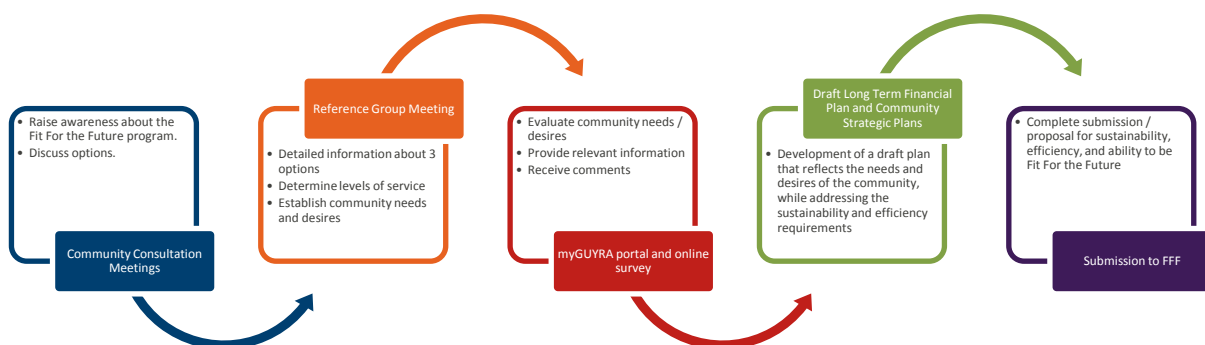
Council then worked with our well established Reference Group, who are invited members of the community representing a diverse range of the Guyra Shire. Members of this group represent ratepayers, residents, community groups and organisations, sporting clubs, village groups, NSW Farmers Federation, youth, and other groups within the Shire. This group is utilised by the Guyra Shire to commence the engagement process and to activate informed discussion within the Shire.

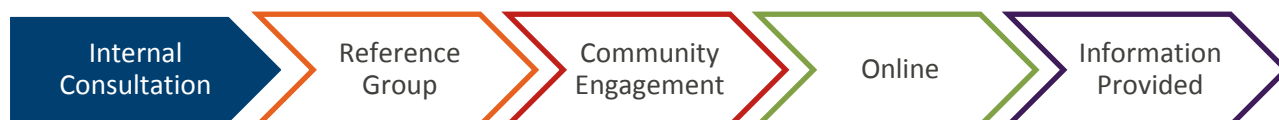
The community engagement aspect of the process involves the wider community and is particularly centred around informed discussion and ensuring the wider community understand the Fit For the Future reform, how it affects Guyra Shire Council, and gives them an opportunity to have their say on Council's submission.

Council has, over the last 3 years, developed an extensive online suite of engagement tools to provide every opportunity for the community to get involved in discussions and have access to relevant information and resources. The tools used by Council include:

- Community Engagement portal – www.myguyra.com – which included a 'Fit For the Future' section, outlining the FFF process, providing links to further information, and offering a range of opportunities for people to have their say in online forums
- Social Media – www.facebook.com/GuyraShireCouncil and www.twitter.com/GuyraShire - allows Council to provide information in real time, to advertise community meetings, and to receive feedback and comments
- Mobile App – available from the App Store and Google Play – the mobile app was released in 2014 and is a real-time reporting and communication app
- Online Survey – Council utilises online survey tools to provide opportunities for the entire population to access the survey

The delivery of the community engagement process was through a range of information provided to the community. The media covered the Fit For the Future process, helping to engage the community and make this a topic of interest in our community. Materials and resources provided by Council complimented the presentations and discussions and ensured that community members could continue discussions following meetings and information sessions.





Inform Staff

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Inform	Rural Council Workshop	Sydney	General Manager	3 November 2014
Inform	MANEX (Management and Executives Meeting)	Council	Managers and Supervisors	18 November 2014
Inform	Indoor Staff Meeting	Council	All indoor staff	24 September 2014
Inform	Amalgamations: To Merge or Not To Merge? – LGNSW Workshop	Sydney	General Manager	26-27 February 2015
Inform	Attendance at Rural Council Bootcamp, coordinated by LGNSW.	Sydney	2 staff members attended this workshop	12-13 March 2015
Consult	Consultative Committee Meeting	Council	Consultative committee	15 April 2015
Inform	Staff Meetings	At workplaces	All GSC Staff – indoor, outdoor, Kolora, Preschool	27-30 April 2015
Inform	Staff Meeting	Council	Indoor staff	21 May 2015
Inform	Outdoor Staff Meeting	Council Depot	Depot	21 May 2015

Staff meetings were held at each of the workplaces - Administration Building, Works Depot, Preschool, and Kolora - to ensure all staff were informed about the Fit For the Future reforms and subsequently Council's resolution to complete the Rural Council template.

Staff were involved in the delivery of the Public Forum held in Guyra on 25 May, 2015. The outdoor workforce was engaged to present a machinery display for the community, and each of the other departments had a display stand. This provided an opportunity for staff to engage with the community and demonstrate the importance of local government to our community.

Councillor Involvement

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Consult	Run workshops for the elected Council to discuss rating scenarios, service levels, template options, proposal, etc.	Council Chambers	Councillors	13 October 2014 10 November 2014 9 February 2015 9 March 2015 13 April 2015 12 May 2015 18 May 2015 15 June 2015
Inform	Attendance at Rural Council workshop coordinated by the Office of Local Government	Sydney	Mayor and General Manager	25 February 2015
Inform	Attendance at workshops coordinated by LGNSW	Dubbo & Port Macquarie	2 councillors attended the Proposal Bootcamp	16-17 March 30-31 March 2015
Consult	Distribution of surveys by Mayor	Guyra	Community	17 April 2015
Inform	Attendance at Armidale Dumaresq Council's Ordinary Council Meeting	Armidale Dumaresq Council	3 Councillors attended	27 April 2015
Inform	Attendance at Glen Innes Severn Council meeting to make representation in their 'Have your Say' section of the meeting to address Guyra Shire's concerns about their boundary adjustment proposals	Glen Innes Severn Council	1 Councillor attended and spoke at the meeting	28 May 2015

Councillor briefing sessions provided updates to Councillors and allowed open discussions and consultation between Executive Staff and Councillors.

Councillors were active within the community throughout the process, to gauge community views and get feedback and ideas for ways that Council could meet the Fit For the Future benchmarks.

Regional Collaboration

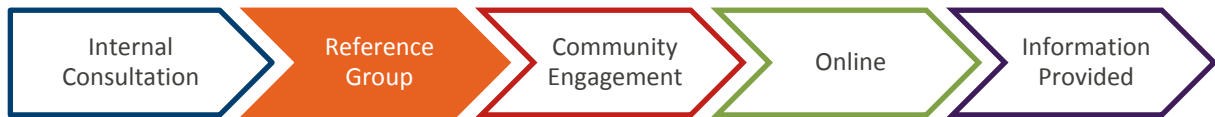
Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Consult	Council hosted a facilitated meeting for the Mayor and General Manager of each of the New England councils, Armidale, Glen Innes, Guyra, Inverell, Tenterfield, Uralla, and Walcha.	Guyra Shire Council Chambers	Regional councils	29 January 2015
Collaborate	Meetings with Mayors and General Managers from Armidale Dumaresq, Walcha, Uralla, and Guyra Shire Councils	Walcha	Mayor and General Manager	16 March 2015
Collaborate	Meetings with Armidale Dumaresq Council	Armidale	Councillors	4 May 2015
Inform	Meeting with Adam Marshall MP (State Member) to discuss directly with the Mayors and General Managers of the Armidale Dumaresq Council, Guyra Shire Council and Uralla Shire Council the Fit for the Future process.	Armidale	State MP, Uralla, Armidale, and Guyra Council Mayors and General Managers	4 May 2015

Regional collaboration formed an important part of the consultation process for the exchange of ideas and development of regionally beneficial plans for the future sustainability of local government.

Guyra Shire Council attempted to obtain commitment from each of the other councils in the New England region to consider a merger business case for this larger regional council option. There was a lack of support for this opportunity and it therefore did not progress.

“UNDERTAKING A MERGER BUSINESS CASE DOES NOT COMMIT A COUNCIL TO MERGING – IT SIMPLY HELPS COUNCILS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE BENEFITS AND COSTS OF A MERGER OPTION.”

Instead, arrangements have been made to commence the establishment of the New England Joint Organisation of Councils, and a draft constitution will be considered in July 2015. These arrangements are integral to Guyra Shire Council’s Rural Council proposal and form the basis of achieving the required scale and capacity in the Fit For the Future process.



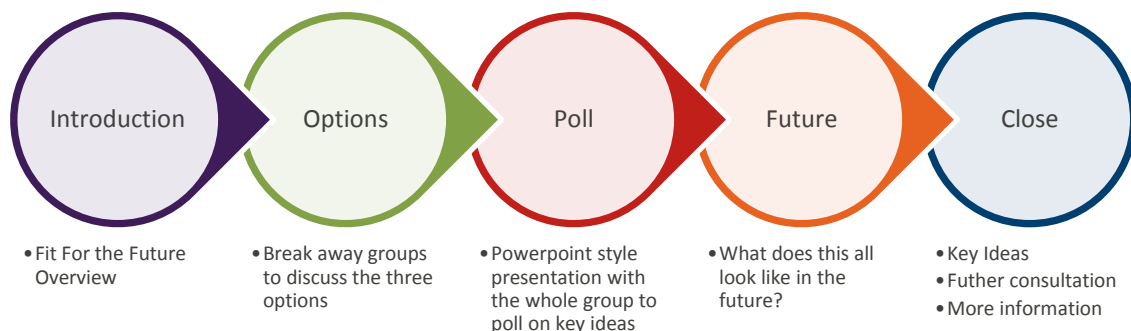
Reference Group

10 December 2015

The Reference Group meet on two occasions during the Fit For the Future process. The first instance on the 10 December 2015, was attended by 35 people, and provided Council with an opportunity to:

- Obtain base survey results for future consultation with the community
- Explain the process
- Develop an understanding for the appetite for change in the community
- Provide a forum for open and collaborative brainstorming on options under the Fit For the Future process

The structure of the meeting provided opportunities for smaller groups to have more detailed discussion and analysis of the options and develop a sound understanding of Council's financial position.



Some comments received throughout the meeting:

- Why not include other Shires?
- Tingha much closer to Inverell.
- Plan to develop more industry with Glen Innes.
- No merger with Armidale Dumaresq alone.
- Geographically Guyra may be the hub of the combined Shire.
- Balance the rural culture against the urban by going bigger.
- Population should be equal in all merged Shires.
- Stick with other smaller councils with similar needs and wants.
- If we were forced to amalgamate then we should become part of a broader council area, rather than being forced to amalgamate with one other Council.
- More Councillors with rural base instead of all city.
- Merge with Armidale, Uralla, and Walcha to even average of cultures between small towns to Armidale.
- Keep Guyra Shire together.

We asked attendees to colour in a map, depicting the region, to identify their ideal scenario if Council were to select the merger proposal. The results were:



34%

Preferred a larger regional merger option, including Tenterfield, Glen Innes, Inverell, Armidale, Guyra, Walcha, and Uralla

10%

Preferred a merger with Guyra, Glen Innes, Tenterfield, and Inverell



7%

Preferred a merger with our 2 northern neighbours



13%

Also preferred the regional option, but left off Tenterfield and Walcha, who they felt had better connections with other regions

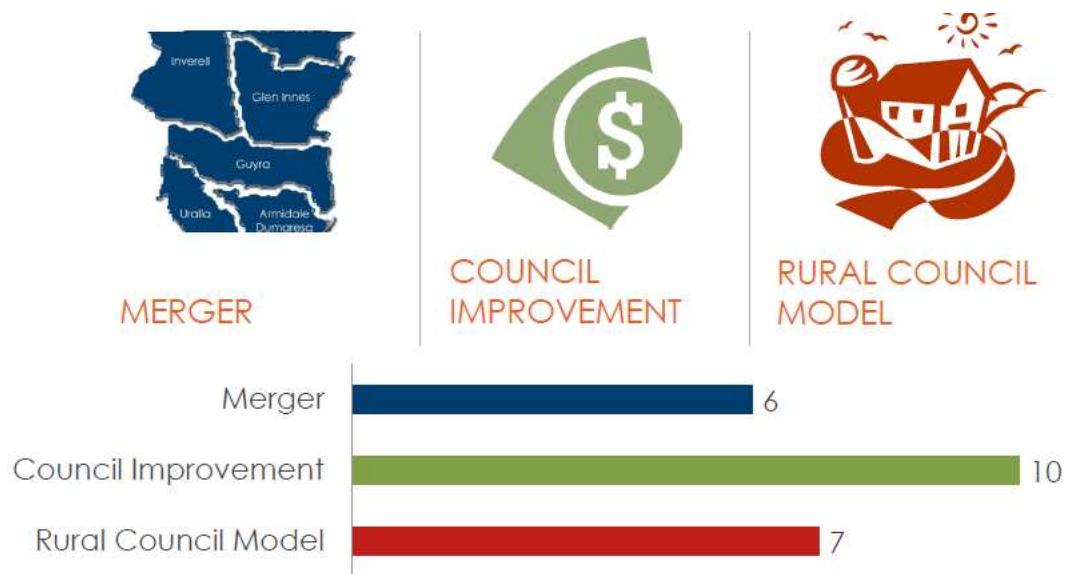


16%

Still preferred a regional merge, but leaving out Armidale as it is too urban, and Walcha, who are more connected to another region



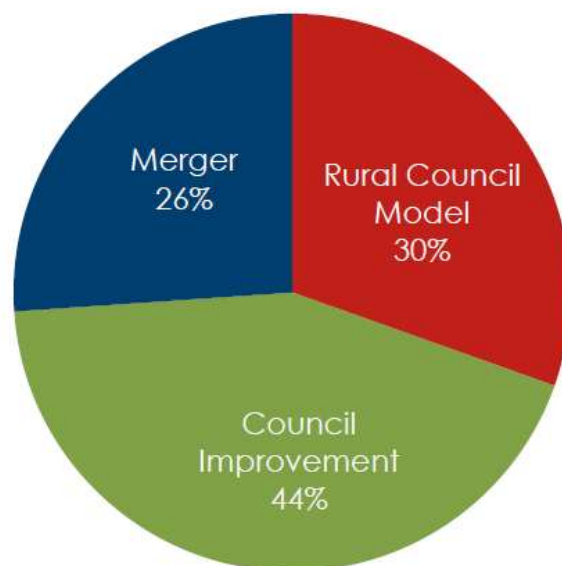
At the end of the evening an anonymous poll was conducted to determine the preferred option of attendees. 23 attendees completed this poll, with the results displayed below:



Despite only 15% of participants responding that they thought the Council Improvement Proposal was achievable by Guyra Shire Council

44%

still indicated that this was their preferred option



20 April 2015



Above: Reference Group meeting held on 20 April 2015.

At the April 2015 Reference Group meeting, Council reiterated its position, with the objective of getting community involvement in its decision on whether to complete the Council Improvement template or the Rural Council template. This was a difficult decision for Council to make and equally difficult for the community. At the end of the evening, Council conducted another anonymous poll, asking attendees again which of the options they preferred. Of the 28 attendees, 14 selected Council Improvement and 14 selected the Rural Council option.

Attendees also had an opportunity to brainstorm ideas under the 6 options for improvement as defined in the Rural Council template. The community came up with a range of views, which have formed the basis for Council's final submission.

- The State Government should develop a universal IT system for local government so that resources can be shared across the entire sector and to make systems more efficient for all councils in NSW.
- Reduce mandatory planning and regulatory compliance requirements for councils.
- Reduce the number of Councillors on the Guyra Shire Council.
- Investigate opportunities for sharing directors in other departments like engineering.
- Do not reduce services provided to the community.
- Work out regional arrangements for the management of community services so they are managed by a single regional body but still provided in each of the local communities, for example libraries.
- Payroll and other universal roles could be carried out in centralised locations and provided as a service to each of the councils in NSW.
- Make use of regional tourism programs to leverage visitation to the entire region.
- Have less council meetings each year.



Community Consultation Meetings

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Involve	Community Consultation meetings		Community members	Black Mountain – 16 September 2014 Ben Lomond – 11 November 2014
Inform	Discuss with representatives of the following groups: Guyra Lions Guyra Rotary Sporting Clubs Tingha Citizens Association Ben Lomond Landcare Ebor Progress Association NSW Farmers Federation		Community groups	January-June 2015
Collaborate	Public Meeting	Wards Mistake Tennis Courts	Residents	24 May 2015
Collaborate	Public Meeting	Guyra Community Hall	Residents	25 May 2015
Collaborate	Public Meeting	Tingha	Residents	26 May 2015
Collaborate	Public Meeting	Black Mountain	Residents	27 May 2015
Collaborate	Public Meeting	Ben Lomond	Residents	28 May 2015
Collaborate	Public Meeting	Ebor	Residents	9 June 2015

The community consultation meetings were structured in a manner that allowed the community to get the full suite of information and then discuss and question this information. This structure was determined to ensure all participants were well-informed and each had an opportunity to voice their opinion. Council gained support from the community and suggestions about ways that we can improve our financial sustainability and work with the community to deliver the required outcomes.

There were 403 attendees registered at the public meetings held between 24-28 May 2015, 298 of these were at the Guyra Public Forum and an average of 25 were at each of the village meetings.

The community was overwhelmingly in support of Council's proposal to complete the Rural Council template and showed an understanding that Council is working towards providing a sustainable, effective solution. They would like to see a more equitable distribution of grant funding that provides essential services like roads.

The comments and ideas from the consultation meetings are summarised below, and were provided to attendees following the meetings as feedback:

Questions asked at the meetings:

Are there any incentives for voluntary amalgamations?

Yes, the NSW Government have developed a package that includes stimulus funding to councils that voluntarily amalgamate. Available to the new council will be:

- \$5m – where 2 councils amalgamate
- \$11m – where 3 councils amalgamate
- \$13.5m – where 4 or more councils amalgamate

What are the incentives if we don't amalgamate?

There is other funding available for councils that do not voluntarily amalgamate, including \$300,000 for each Joint Organisation of Councils, and grants from a pool of \$4m for the Rural Council Innovation Fund.

What are the costs of amalgamations?

It is anticipated that the funding provided from the NSW Government for amalgamating councils would be used for the establishment of the new council, and would not be sufficient to improve any services or reduce the asset backlog for any of the councils involved.

Questions asked at the meetings:

What is difference between Council Improvement (Stand Alone) and Rural Council?

While the expected benchmarks are the same in both templates, the difference is in the recognition that small rural councils face unique challenges and are often the provider of services to the community that are not the core business of councils.

The NSW Government accommodate these challenges in template 3 by allowing additional financial information to be included, and a longer period to reach the benchmarks.

What is a "Rural Council"?

The NSW Government have rescinded the concept of there being a separate 'Rural Council Model,' they have instead suggested options that small councils completing this template could pursue to improve sustainability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Details of Council's proposal are included later in this document. Council has aimed to develop strategies that adhere to the guidelines for improvements and efficiencies, while still assuring that the unique needs of the Guyra Shire community are being met. We welcome feedback on the proposal, or any ideas the community may have for improvement.

What are the other councils in our region doing?

Armidale Dumaresq Council – Council Improvement template with an annexure proposing an amalgamation with Guyra and Uralla.

Glen Innes – Council Improvement template, which includes expanding their Shire boundary, taking in areas of Guyra, Inverell, and Tenterfield

Inverell – Council Improvement

Uralla – Council Improvement

Walcha – Rural Council

Tenterfield – Council Improvement

Questions asked at the meetings:

How will being a member of the Joint Organisation help Council?

There are opportunities for efficiencies to be gained through effective regional planning and management of some services and functions of Council.

In many instances there is duplication between councils that could be reduced under the Joint Organisation concept.

What functions does council think will come under the Joint Organisation?

Any large, regional based, projects are likely to evolve into the Joint Organisation. Council will be suggesting that things like tourism, library management, regional road construction, etc will become services delivered by the Joint Organisation.

For example, a regional road crew would be able to complete large sections of road that currently cross between different shires.

Who will make the decisions about our shire under the Joint Organisation?

Local decisions will still be made locally, by elected members. The Mayor will become a member of the Joint Organisation Board, who will be responsible for decision making functions that affect the region.

Questions asked at the meetings:

What will we get for the 30% rate rise?

The 30% rate rise has been calculated to put Council in a position to balance our current income and operating costs. Any surplus that is generated by this additional income contribute to reducing Council's asset backlog, particularly the road network.

What do rural ratepayers get for their already higher rates?

The rural road network costs Council significantly more to maintain and improve than what is collected in rural rates.

The rating system has been developed to attempt to provide equity between ratepayers based on capacity to pay.

Will this be the last rate rise?

The current Council have developed their 10 year plan, where it shows that this is the only rate rise to be imposed over the next 10 years.

Council cannot guarantee that a newly elected Council would not subject ratepayers to further rate rises.

Other comments and suggestions from the community...



We asked the community 3 important questions at each of the community meetings, and asked them to cast their vote by holding up a coloured card:

Green
=
Yes / Agree

Red
=
No / Disagree

DO YOU AGREE WITH THE RECOMMENDATION FOR GUYRA SHIRE COUNCIL TO
AMALGAMATE WITH ARMIDALE DUMARESQ COUNCIL?



Guyra



Tingha



Black Mountain



Ben Lomond

Why not?

Comments from the community...

- Armidale is a city, which is where their focus is. We would lose our rural identity, and money would be spent on urban projects.
- There is a completely different culture in Armidale, which is an urban, education-based, city.
- No financial gain to be achieved through amalgamation.
- Connection to country and sense of belonging.
- We want to retain our local decision making functions.
- Guyra Shire Council provides a good funding model and support to villages, which would likely be sacrificed under any merger scenario.
- Rural councils would be eliminated, who have a better understanding of the issues and opportunities available to rural communities.
- Armidale Dumaresq Council are irresponsible, they inherited the airport and have a university, and still can't make themselves sustainable.
- We don't want to see compartmentalised development, which often occurs in larger communities.
- Armidale Dumaresq Council have proven themselves to be less economically competent than most Councils, why would we want to be part of that.
- Distance of 'fringe dwellers' to Armidale is too far and we would receive no services or representation,
- The centre of our community is Guyra, and that is the community of interest for our services and social lives.

DO YOU SUPPORT GUYRA SHIRE COUNCIL'S DECISION TO COMPLETE THE RURAL COUNCIL TEMPLATE?



Guyra



Tingha



Black Mountain



Ben Lomond

DO YOU SUPPORT A 30% RATE RISE FOR GUYRA SHIRE COUNCIL TO REMAIN INDEPENDENT AS A RURAL COUNCIL?



Guyra



Tingha



Black Mountain



Ben Lomond

Listening Posts

A Fit For the Future physical 'portal' was established to compliment the online portal. An interview room in the foyer of the Council administration building was repurposed into this Fit For the Future room, which contained all information relating to the process, opportunities to talk with staff and councillors about Guyra's Fit For the Future proposal, and access to the online resources.



Council's General Manager and Councillors also set up a stall for a day each in the main streets of Guyra and Tingha.



Surveys

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Consult	Comprehensive survey	Accessible online and print copies provided.	Residents	25 March 2015 – 22 June 2015
Consult	Short survey, assessing specifically the Rural Council aspects, as this was produced following Council's resolution to complete the Rural Council Proposal	Sent to all households in the Guyra Shire	Residents	May 2015
Consult	Public Meeting surveys – participants voted yes/agree or no/disagree to three key questions using red and green flyers	Across Shire	Residents	24-28 May 2015

A comprehensive survey, exploring the three template options under the FFF, was conducted from 25 March 2015 to 22 June 2015. The survey was available to the public in a number of ways:

- Online.
- Distributed throughout the Shire.
- Provided to all those whom attended stakeholder/ reference group meetings and the public forums.
- Distributed to businesses in the main street of Guyra.
- Council Officers surveyed locals who visited the listening post.
- Available on Council's mobile app.

The full survey can be found online at <http://www.myguyra.com/#!survey/c1lis>.

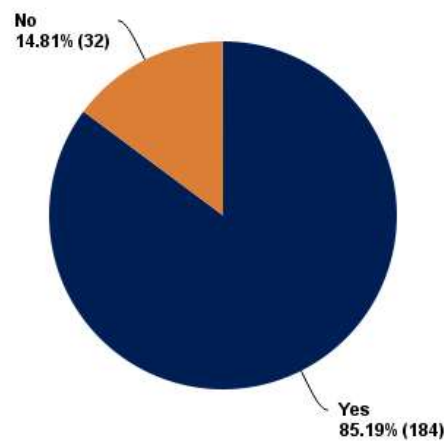
There were 216 responses to this comprehensive survey.

Results

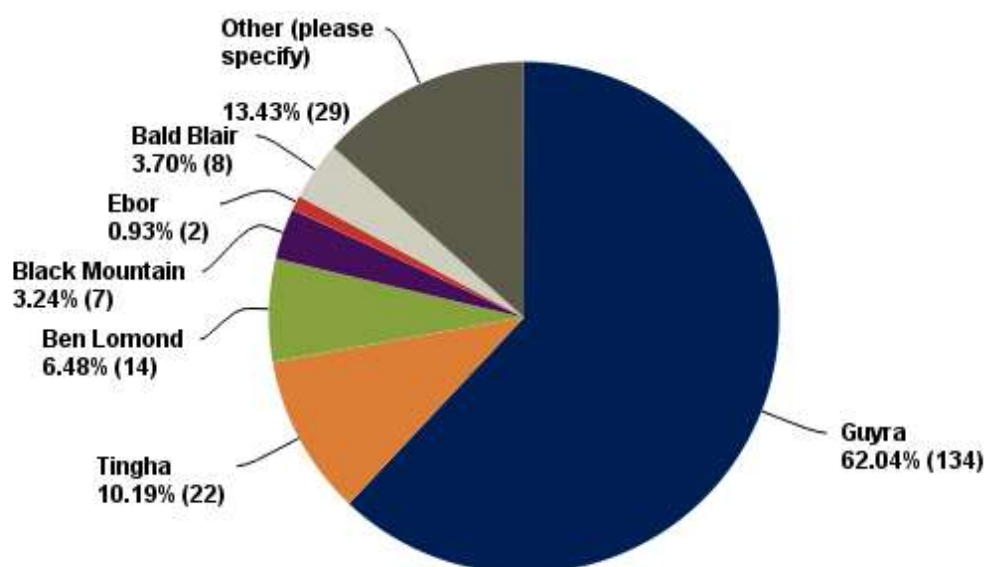
Q1: Would you classify yourself as a rural or urban resident?



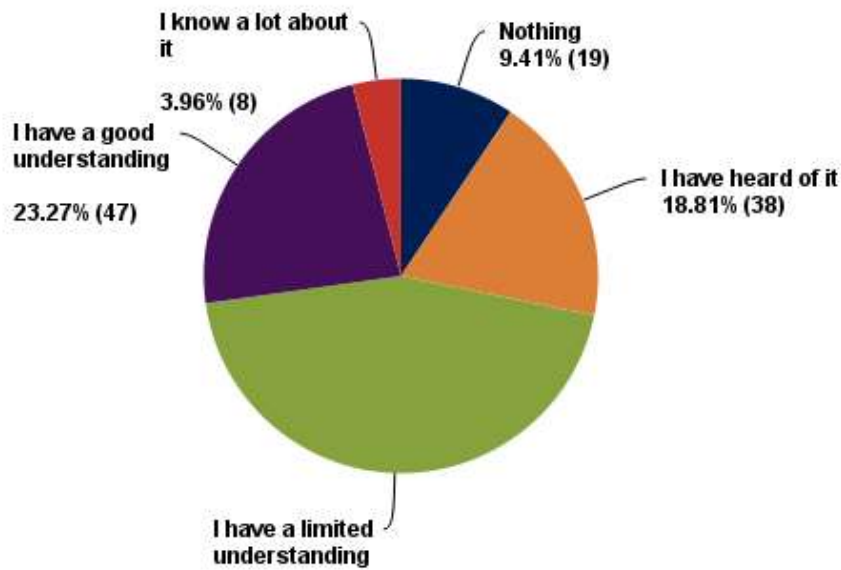
Q2: Do you own property in the Guyra Shire?



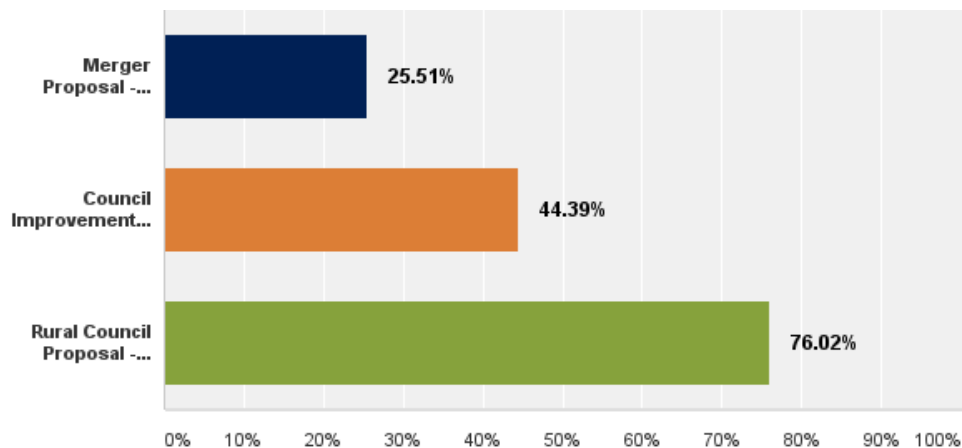
Q3: In which area of the Guyra Shire do you predominately live or own property?



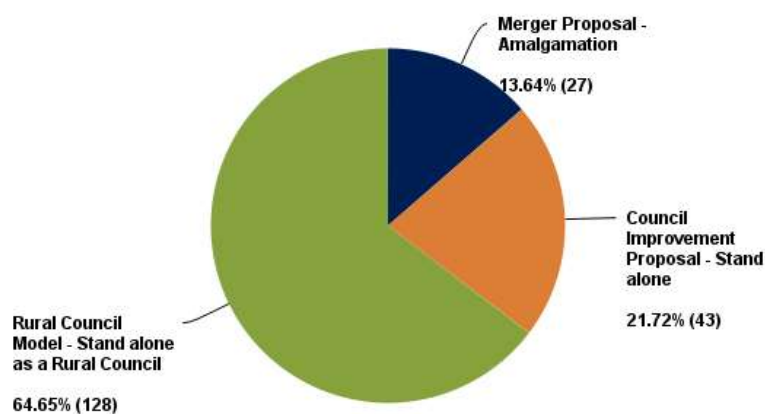
Q4: How much do you know about the Fit For the Future process?



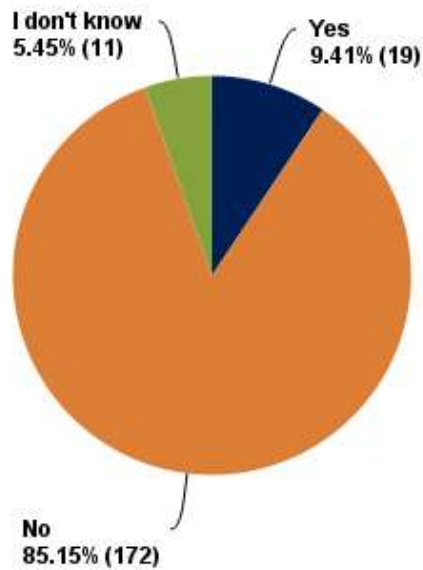
Q5: What options are you willing to explore?



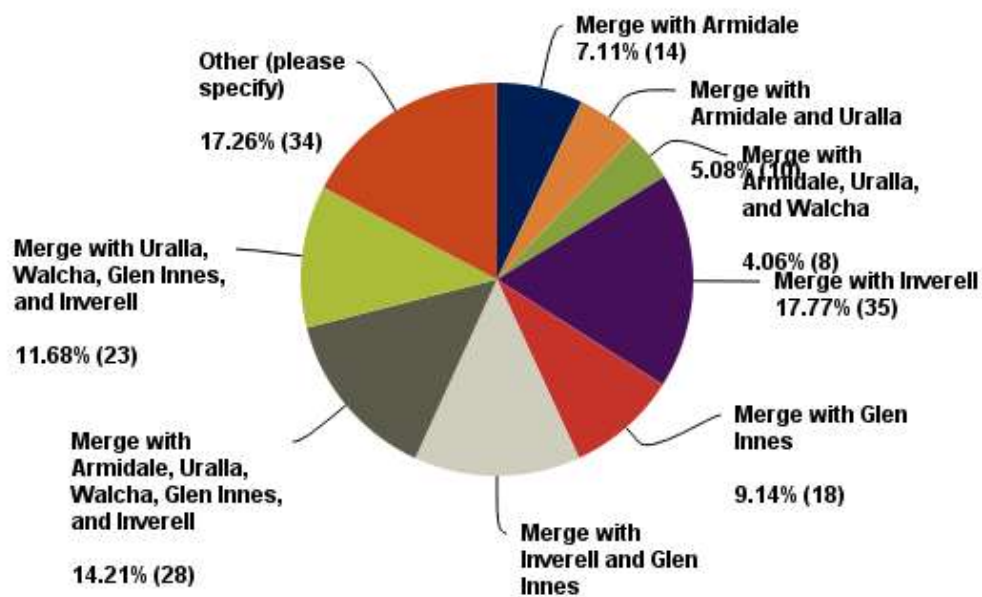
Q6: What is your preferred option?



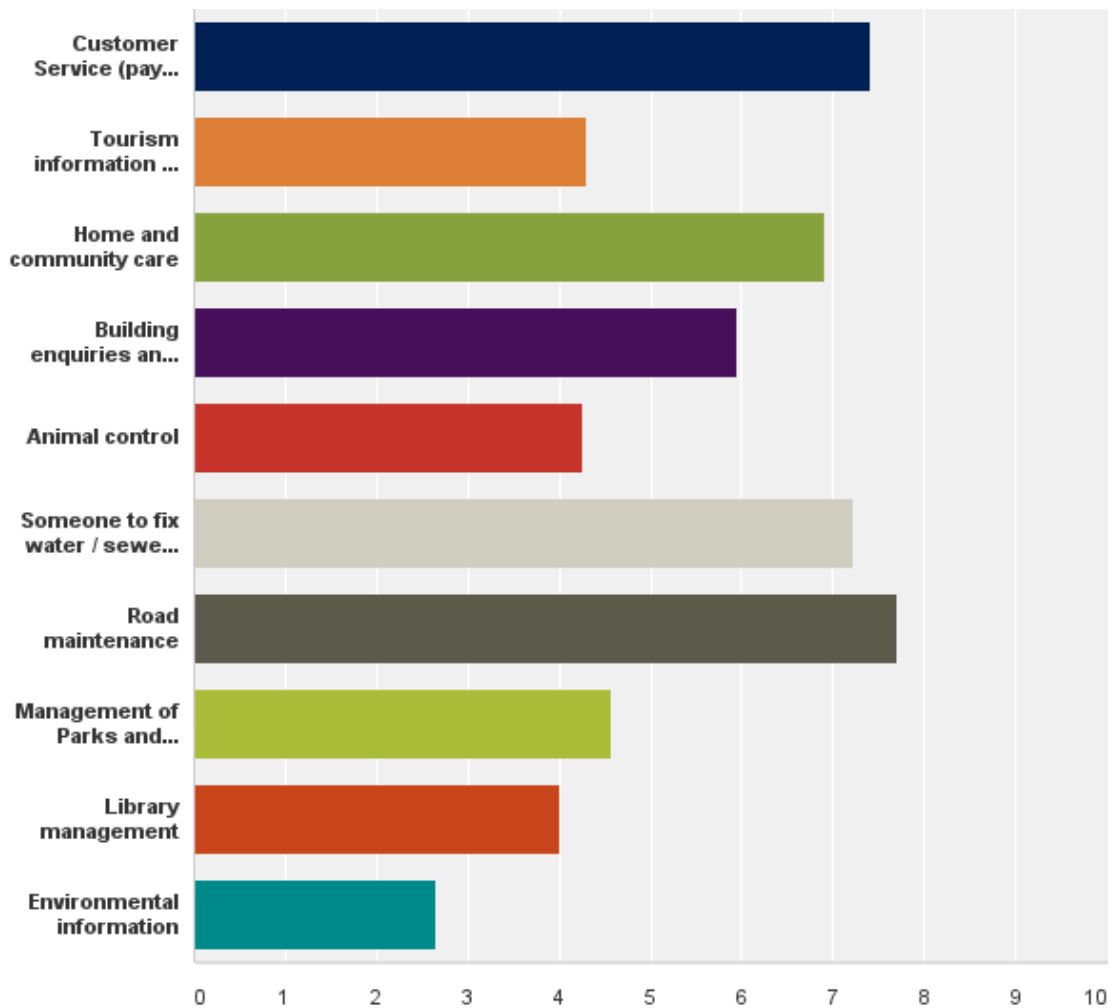
Q7: Do you support the recommendation by the Independent Local Government Review Panel for Guyra Shire to amalgamate with Armidale Dumaresq Council?



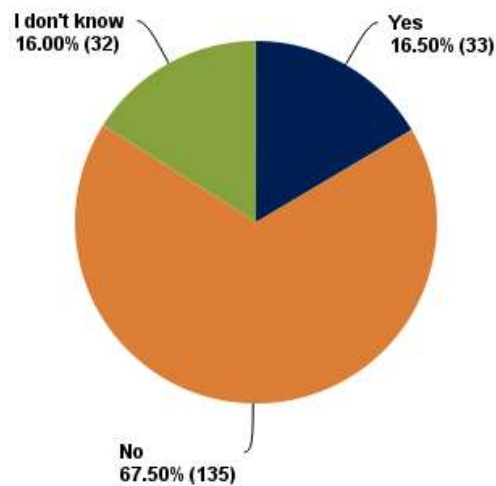
Q8: There are multiple merger scenarios that could potentially be explored. If the Guyra Shire was to merge, which scenario would you prefer?



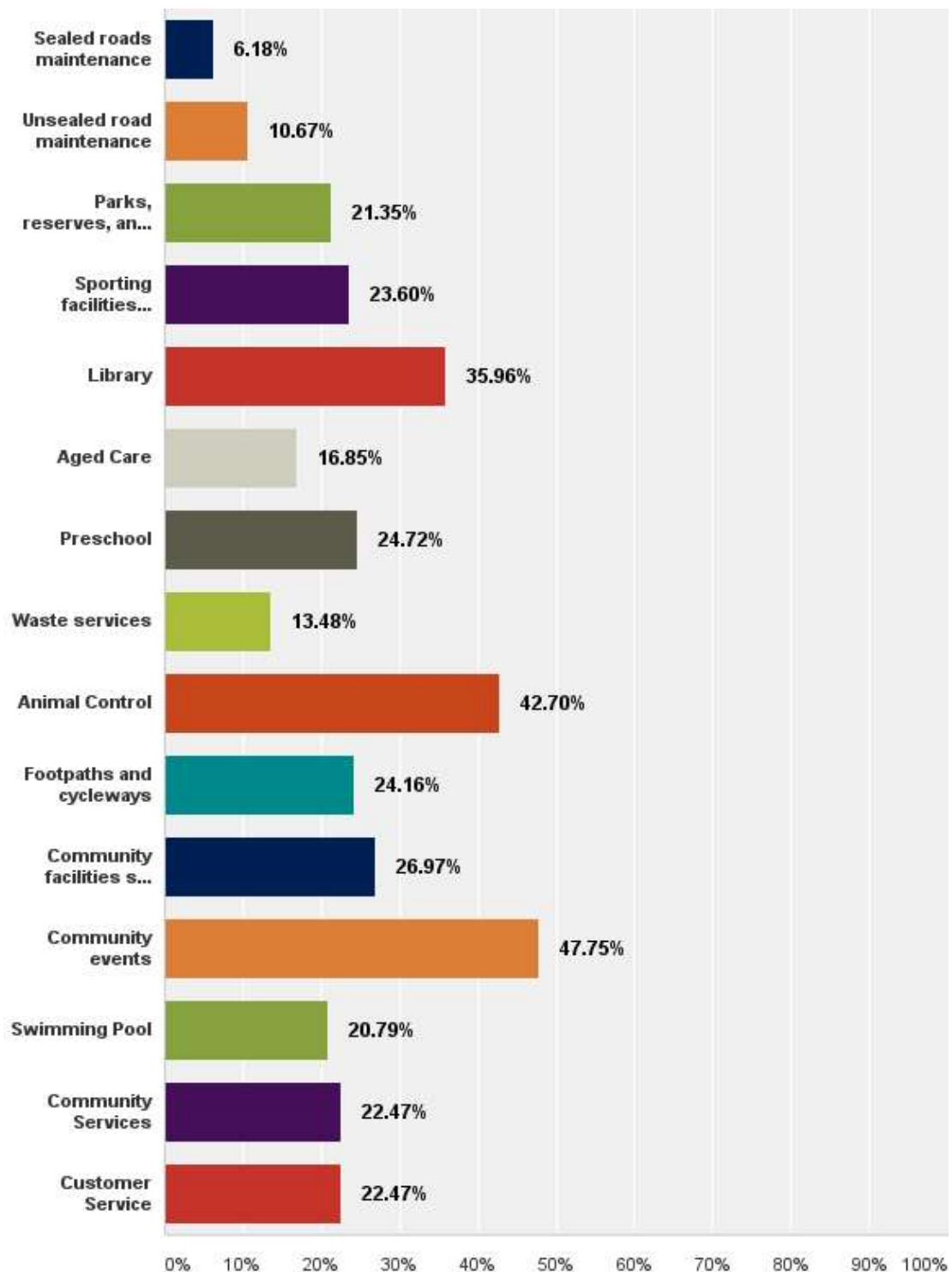
Q9: If Council were to form part of a merger and was able to retain a service centre in Guyra, rank the services, in order of importance, to be delivered locally? That is, what services MUST be delivered from Guyra? (10 is most important, 1 is least important).



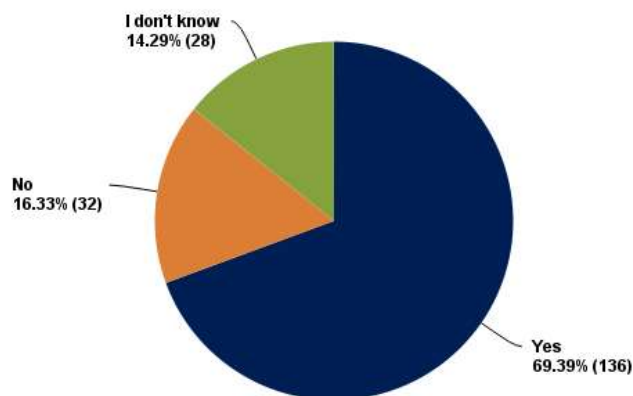
Q10: If it meant Guyra Shire could become sustainable and remain completely independent would you accept an 80% rate rise?



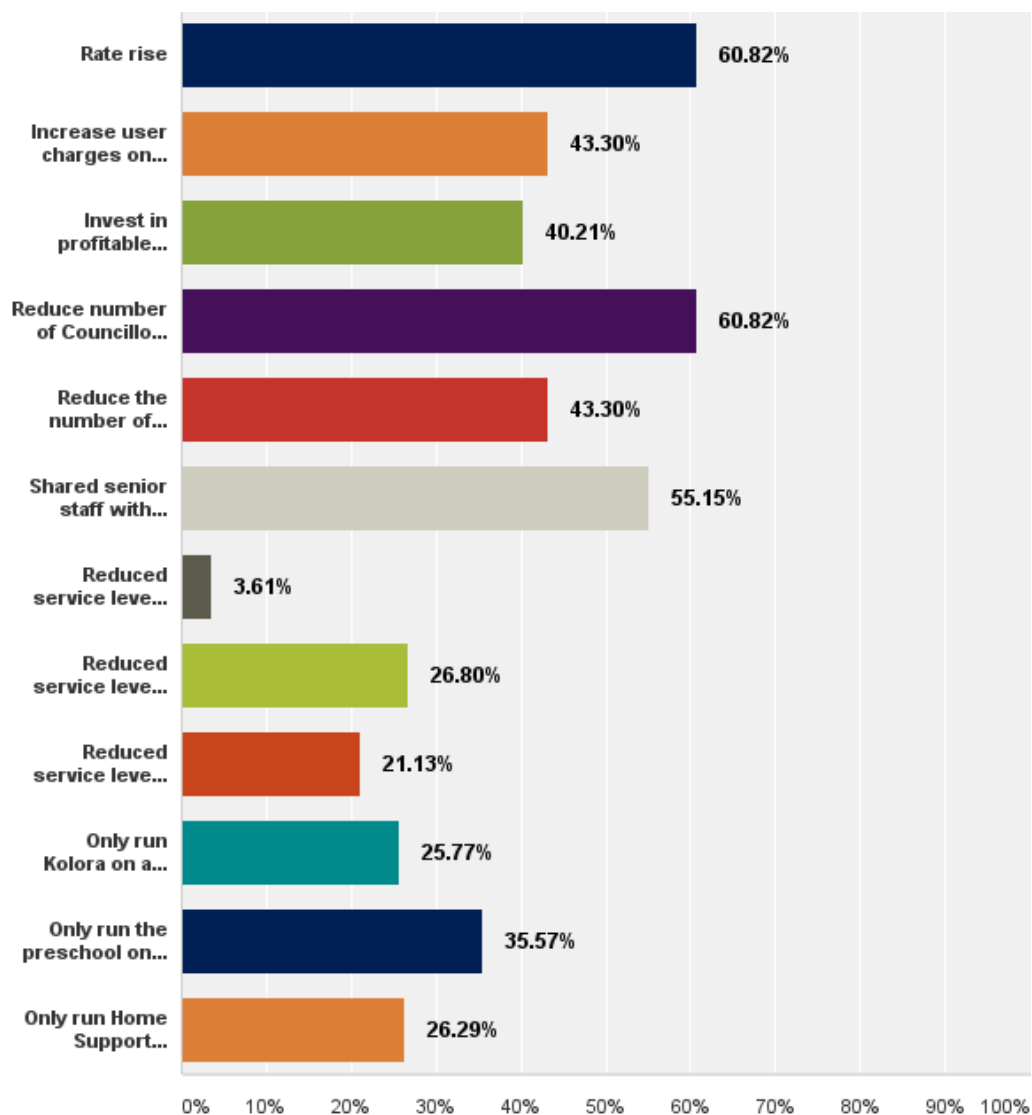
Q11: An effective Council is one that delivers services and infrastructure that meets the needs of the community. If Council had no other option but to reduce service levels, and you had to make the best choice for the entire community, in what areas would you have service levels reduced? You may select more than one answer.



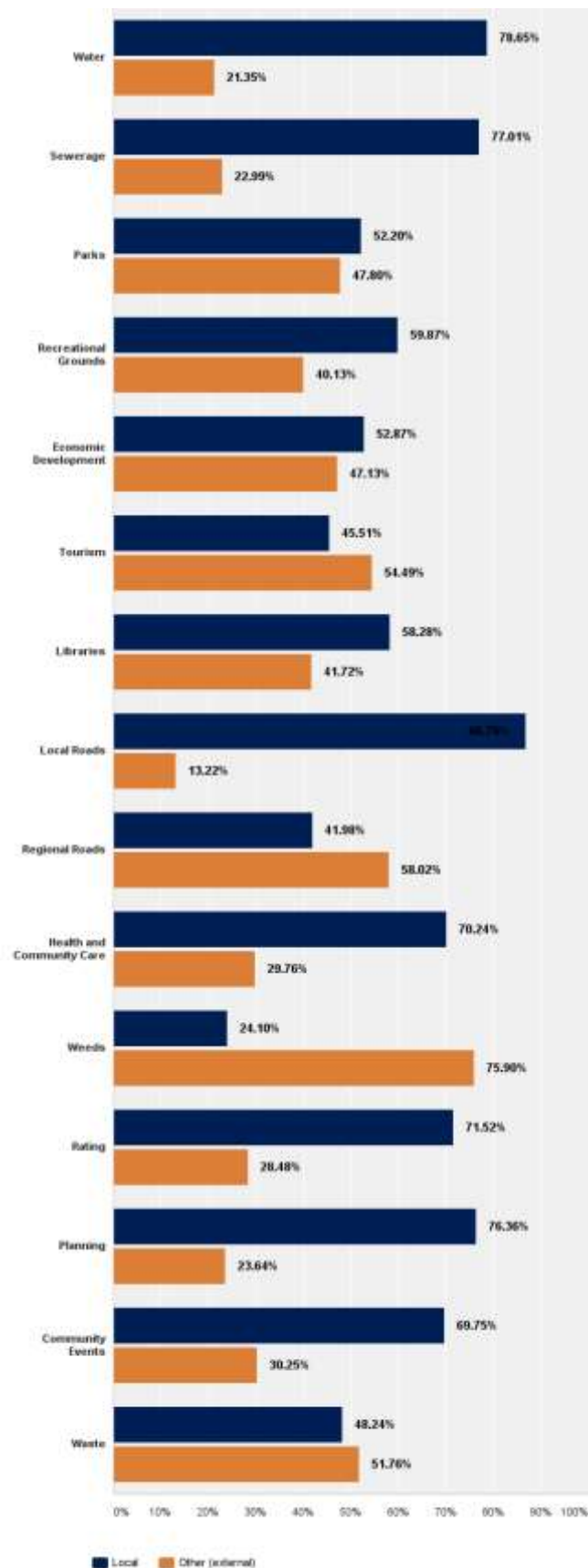
Q12: If it meant Guyra Shire could become sustainable and independent as a Rural Council would you accept a 30% rate rise?



Q13: What changes to the Guyra Shire Council would you accept, to achieve efficiencies as a Rural Council?
You may select more than one answer.



Q14: What services do you think need to be retained locally, and what services could be provided by another (outside) organisation? For example another council, or a contractor.



Submissions

TO PEOPLE OF GUYRA SHIRE

Thank you for the opportunity to publicly confirm my support for Guyra Shire Council and the huge efforts being made to address the NSW Government's *Fit for the Future* local government reform package. This is an important process and I urge the community to work with Council and support its choice to pursue the *Rural Council* model.

Fit for the Future is the government's response to the final recommendations of the Independent Local Government Review Panel and the Local Government Acts Taskforce, following three years of consultation with the local government sector, which I was involved in while still Mayor of Gunnedah Shire Council.

This package presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve what Local Government does and the services offered to our communities.

I commend Guyra Shire Councillors and staff for working with you, the local community, and providing opportunities for you to learn more about this process and the future Councils sees for itself and the entire Shire. It is important that there is transparency surrounding this process and that includes setting out the options that could make the Council *Fit for the Future*, and how best to meet the demands of remaining viable into the future.

I assure you that I remain steadfast in my support of small councils, as I am of all councils in the Northern Tablelands, and my commitment to put the decisions that are made in consultation with the community to the government as strongly as I can.

ADAM MARSHALL MP
Member for Northern Tablelands

Council received several submissions about our community engagement process, each of these submissions commended Council on involving the community.

"The use of the green and red cards not only added a touch of novelty it also provided an interesting way of giving a visual representation of how the community felt. A secondary result occurred when those who held up the green cards began to develop a feeling of unity initially among themselves and later with the council."

"I for one congratulate you for leading the community in what you thought (and I agree) to be the right direction."

"You got to give Guyra a good pat on the back at least you are having a good community discussion about your future..."

29/5/15.

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to confirm our belief that the Guyra Shire Council should not amalgamate with any other council. Bigger is often not better, and would certainly not be in this case! The council, as it is, has a "good handle" on the needs and ongoing future requirements for our area. As five families involved with sheep/ café/ and tourism, we are most satisfied with our dealings with the council, staff, and all it represents.

Thank you sincerely,

15.5.2015

Dear Sir,

Just to let you know that we will both be away on a northern tour during the time of all the meetings to determine the council's future.

We are so happy as residents under the current council and do wish that arrangement to continue unchanged.

We believe that combining with other councils would not be a satisfactory, controllable situation.

Please accept this letter as 2 votes strongly in favour of maintaining Guyra as the one and only in charge here.

We wish you all the very best.

Guyra Shire Council
Bearfdy Street
Guyra 2365

June 22nd, 2015

22 JUN 2015

Dear Councillors,

At its last meeting the Ben Lomond Landcare group wished to reinforce our support for the Council's submission to the State Government. We support the concept of intercouncil co-operation for service delivery for selective services which would produce an economy of scale. We would also urge the Council to insist upon the abolition of rate pegging as a guaranteed part of the agreement.

We would also urge the council to consider the promotion of entrepreneurial agricultural endeavours in the area with the aim of having Guyra as a showcase community for innovation and possibly even training by the enterprises.

Since Roger Fletcher is well known to the area and visits frequently we have decided to ask him to manage a workshop for the community with regard to greater development of projects currently underway and potential for new ones. He has consistently demonstrated a great interest and involvement in helping rural communities to become more financially viable and we would ask that Council consider requesting a meeting with him, possibly whilst he is here for the workshops, to speak to Council about potential for economic development opportunities in the area. Perhaps Guyra Council could even host the workshop envisaged.

It was also noted that despite criticisms from outside people in that we no longer have an Economic development Office or officer, we wholeheartedly suggest and support the rationale that development should always come from the grassroots in a bottom up rather than top down process in order to retain the uniqueness of the community.

We hope that this letter will be of some assistance with your endeavours for the final submission

Yours Faithfully

Some submissions also outlined suggestions for improvement:

- Promote people changing their bin service from large to small. They save \$ on rates, Council saves \$ on landfill and we help the environment!
- What about a gym run by Council – something like 24/7 gyms. People involved in sporting teams locally get a discount to subscription and hub members etc?
- Tourist tours of tomato farm, green valley, trout farm, Tingha and Guyra museums, waterfalls etc
- Stop mowing roadsides out of town. This is a rural area – yes, it looks nice to have the sides of the road mowed but it is wasted money
- Present Kolora Homes buildings – could be sold off or renovated to provide up to date strata units to be sold to the general public.
- Maintain the library but have a small charge for all borrowings.

- Local Government is one of the pillars of any community. They are an organisation that gives service and attention to their constituents. There is no clearer guideline than Local means local.
- The debit side of amalgamation is the increased disconnection and dislocated 'service' that comes from distant operations.
- The loyalty and pride of staff both indoor and outdoor is amplified when they work within their own LGA and community.
- Guyra is a discrete area which is not to say that we can't pick and choose from other town's offerings e.g. education.
- Local organisations work well with Guyra Council. Volunteer groups are able to consult with local government and vice versa. This is facilitated by being in a smaller unified council.
- Various experts in the local government field are strongly in favour of the 'bigger is not necessarily best' mantra for Councils.
- When Costa's Blush Tomato glasshouses were first mooted by Godfrey Dol and the glasshouse plan presented, Guyra Council to its credit worked with Costas without giving away any land or free water and adhering to all regulations .. This meant that the tomato crop was able to be planted in record time for the growing season to commence!
- Costas have always been in praise of Guyra council and its staff for their 'can do' abilities! Being a smaller council meant that there was not buck passing. It was shoulders to the wheel for all.
- Guyra Council will be better placed than many others for spin-off industries to the glasshouses and indeed fresh new businesses in the future.
- Previously, when there was a threat of amalgamation, I discussed with the unions the issues surrounding employment. At that time they said that Councils could not off-load staff in under 2 years. To my mind this begs the question of where are the cost savings said to be gained by amalgamation.
- We are proven to be optimistic and have the advantage of past and recent success in attracting industry and we will make sure that we can drive this well into the future if left alone!

Throughout the process a number of others submissions were received for Council's consideration. There were 46 'Comments' forms submitted to Council, all of which supported Council's decision to complete the Rural Council template and evidenced the dissatisfaction in the community about the recommendation for Guyra Shire Council to amalgamate with Armidale Dumaresq Council.

Guyra Shire Council also received 3 copies of submissions sent to Glen Innes Severn Council in relation to their public exhibition of their draft proposal, these 3 submissions detailed objections to the proposed boundary adjustments included in Glen Innes Severn Council's proposal. A community run poll on the topic was also received:

With Anzac Day today here and the Ben Lomond community in large part attending, after the official ceremony with everyone having tea we asked for a quick pole re the proposal of Ben Lomond going into Glen Severn Shire. The results were as follows (two checks of the count).

1 Yes (property already in good portion in Glen Severn they added as explanation)

6 Don't know, not sure (there was no time to provide any prior information)

15 No.

Two submissions made to the local newspaper, the Guyra Argus, showed different points of opinion:

Farmers pledge support

May 7, 2015

The Guyra branch of the NSW Farmers Association has thrown its support behind Guyra Shire Council in their efforts to remain a stand alone shire. With the future of the local Council at stake there was a good roll up to the meeting to hear Councillors Simon Murray, Dot Vickery and general manager Peter Stewart give an outline on the councils Fit for the Future Plan.

The meeting resolved to support the council in their Rural Council Model. This is the model which is most achievable by our council but will still mean increase in rates by approximately 30%. A forced amalgamation with Armidale could see an 80% rate rise, something that will impact heavily on rural ratepayers. Residents and property owners are urged to attend one of the public meetings that will be held across in the coming weeks.

The Guyra Branch also opposed a proposition by Glen Innes to include Ben Lomond, Wandsworth, Llangothlin and large part of Wards Mistake into their Shire. The branch also opposed the Armidale Dumaresq Councils proposal to merge with Guyra Shire.

Guyra Shire Council tries to buy short term future with a 30% rate hike

Thursday May 28, 2015

The meeting on Monday night May 25 was successful in attracting significant interest from the community but appeared to be pointed towards achieving approval of a 30% rate increase with no assurance from the meeting organisers that this increase would guarantee the continued autonomy of Guyra Shire Council into the future or the elimination of any cut-backs in services.

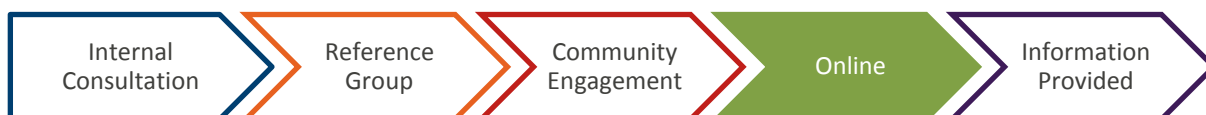
I feel the acceptance of this increase shown by the majority of the crowd was bewildering and very dangerous.

To agree with a rate increase to shore-up the requirements for the adoption of the stand-alone rural council option may seem to be a necessary step. I question its justification without any commitment from Council to maintain the current level of services let alone make any improvements.

The recommendations put forward by the Independent Review Panel that Guyra merge with Armidale Dumaresq Council and/or Uralla, and Glen Innes be left alone with no change, reeks of skulduggery. It leaves Glen Innes Council (who appear to be in financial and operational turmoil) in the enviable position of being able to drive a wedge through Guyra Shire, as pointed out at Monday's meeting.

The people of our very much loved region need to think very deeply about this extremely important issue.

With the expected upturn in the agricultural industry in Australia because of world demand, now is the time to foster and encourage regional councils and communities regardless of size or population. So lobby your councillors, the Minister of Local Government (Paul Toole MP, Level 17NE, 52 Martin Place, Sydney NSW 2000), or email office@toole.minister.nsw.gov.au and your local member Adam Marshall.



myGUYRA.com

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	Fit For the Future Portal on www.myguyra.com website.	Online	Public	Site launched on 25 March 2015

The myguyra.com website has been developed as a community collaboration tool for the purposes for developing, reviewing, and engaging with the community on Integrated Planning and Reporting. This tool has been extended to provide a portal containing all information pertaining to the Fit For the Future process including:

- Areas for community discussion and comment on the Fit For the Future proposal.
- A public forum.
- Video about the process and Council's position.
- Link to the community survey.
- Links to information produced by the Office of Local Government (www.fitforthefuture.nsw.gov.au).
- Links to TCorp report for residents to gain a better understanding of the Council's current position.
- Links to the Office of Local Government for 'Comparative Information for Guyra Shire Council 2012-13').

This portal has been developed to provide a 'one-stop-shop' to all information about the Fit For the Future process so that the community is well informed.

The Fit For the Future online portal was launched on 25 March 2015, visitation to the site from this date to 17 June 2015 was:



Are we Fit For the Future?

Council is working on becoming Fit For the Future under the NSW Government reform package. We urge the community to get involved in determining our future. On this site you will find information and resources, and opportunities to have your say on the future of Guyra Shire.

"We need smart, modern local councils that can work with the State to deliver the housing, jobs, and transport people need"



Step 1. What is Fit For the Future?



Fit for the Future

[Link to the NSW Fit For the Future website](#)



INDEPENDENT LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW PANEL

[Reports from the Independent Review Panel](#)



New South Wales Treasury Corporation

[Guyra Shire Council's TCorp Report](#)

Step 2. What are our options?

There are 3 options for councils to show that they are Fit For the Future. Guyra Shire Council was recommended to merge with Armidale Dumaresq Council. Do you think this is the right option for our community?

[Template 1: Voluntary Merger](#)

[Template 2: Council Improvement Proposal](#)

[Template 3: Rural Council Proposal](#)

Step 3. What is your opinion?

Tell us what you think. Go to our survey page and complete the full survey.



Step 4. Join the Discussion

Click on the button below to enter the forum space and discuss FFF.



Community consultation is an important factor in how Guyra
Shire Council will become Fit For the Future.

We hope you visit this site again and engage in the discussion.

What does a merger look like for Guyra Shire?
We asked the Reference Group, and they came up with various scenarios of possible merger options, which you can see below.



Voluntary Mergers

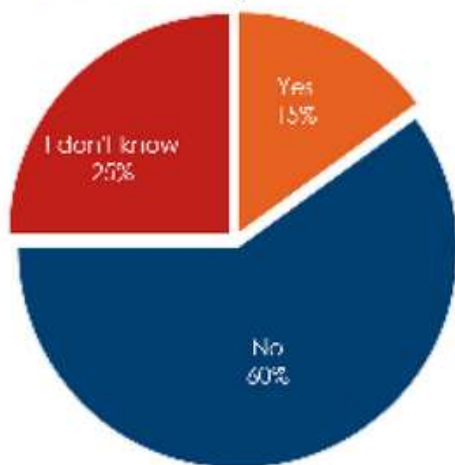
Amalgamations are generally undertaken in the belief that larger local government areas are more efficient and effective in the long term. Local government boundaries were originally defined when transport and communication were more difficult than experienced in today's society, and it can be therefore considered that these boundaries are not representative of the needs of the modern community.

In its report, the Local Government Review Panel recommended that Guyra Shire Council and Armidale Dumaresq Council be amalgamated. They recognised that amalgamation has been proposed on several previous occasions and that it has been strongly resisted by the community, however, if they felt that evidence from the amalgamation to form Tamworth Regional Council showed considerable benefits.

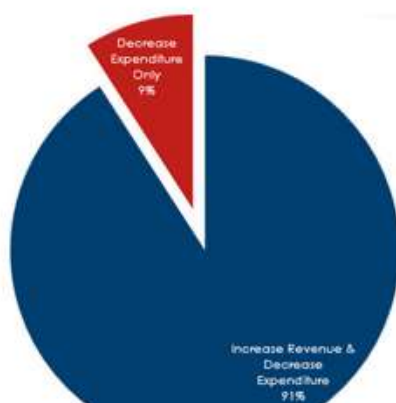
[Guidance Material](#)

[Template](#)

We presented some figures to the Reference Group about becoming financially Fit For the Future. When asked if they thought the Council Improvement option was achievable they said:



When asked how they would improve our financial position they said:



Council Improvement

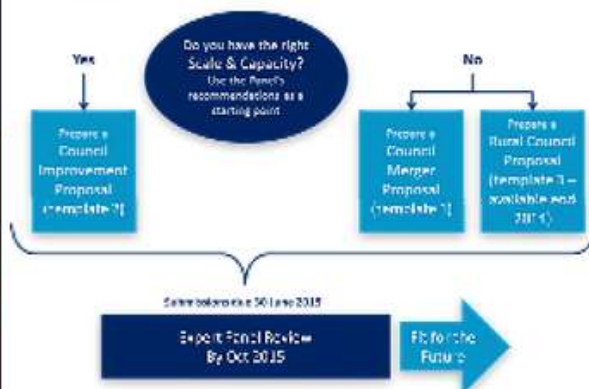
Councils who complete the Council Improvement Template are required to show evidence of how they can become Fit For the Future.

Guyra Shire Council does not currently meet the benchmarks for Fit For the Future, and significant changes to income and expenditure will be required if Council resolves to complete this template. Some areas in particular are Council's asset renewal backlog, own source revenue, and operating income and expenditure.

We will need to involve the community in reviewing Council's service levels, and propose that a special rate variation be applied to assist Council in meeting these benchmarks.

[Guidance Material](#)

[Template](#)



Rural Council

The Rural Council proposal is another option for councils who do not meet the scale and capacity benchmarks, but can evidence a strong need and desire by their community to retain their local identity.

The proposal must include long term objectives of becoming more financially sustainable and should include innovative actions such as resource sharing with other councils.

Guyra Shire Council was not recommended to become a rural council, however may be able to present a strong case as we achieve 6.5 of the 9 characteristics below:

- ✓ Small and static or declining population spread over a large area.
- ✓ Local economies that are based on agricultural or resource industries.
- ✓ High operating costs associated with a dispersed population and limited opportunities for return on investment.
- ✓ High importance of retaining local identity, social capital, and capacity for service delivery.
- ✓ Low rate base and high grant reliance.
- ✓ Difficulty in attracting and retaining skilled and experienced staff.
- ✓ Challenges in financial sustainability and provision of adequate services and infrastructure.
- ✗ Long distance to a major (or sub-regional) centre.
- ✗ Limited options for mergers.

Help us prepare our Rural Council Proposal

Draft Proposal on Exhibition

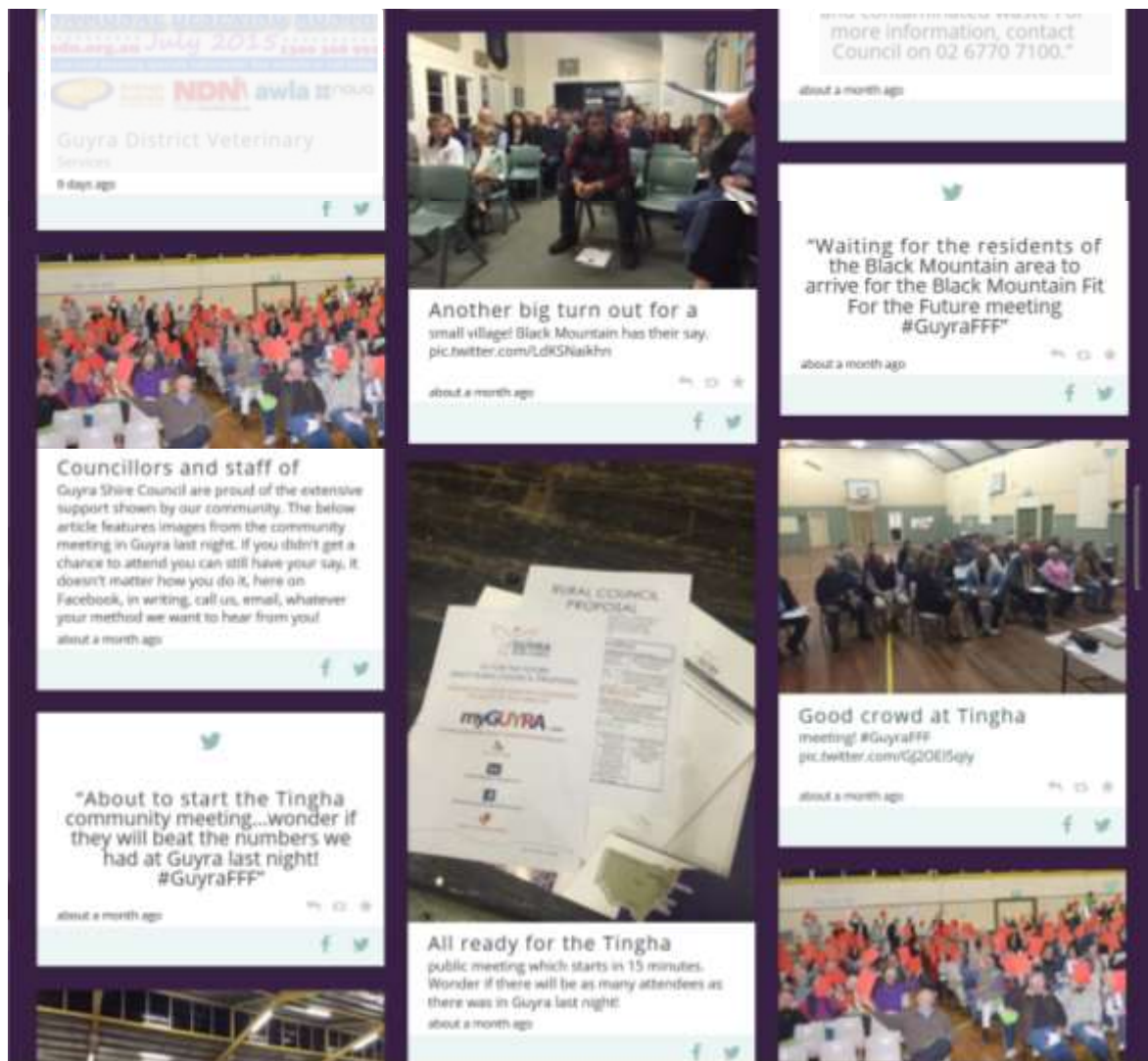
Guidance Material

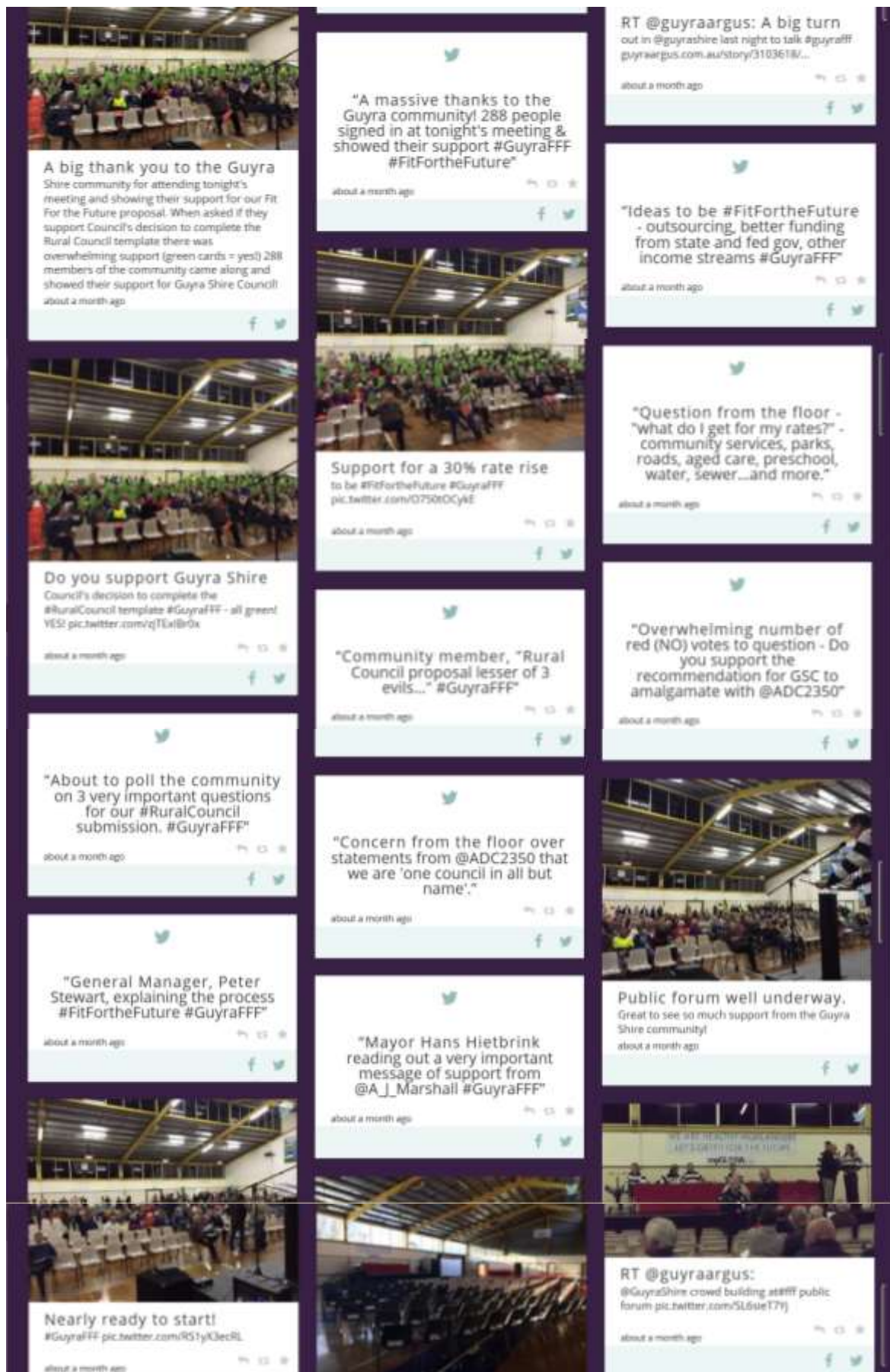
Template

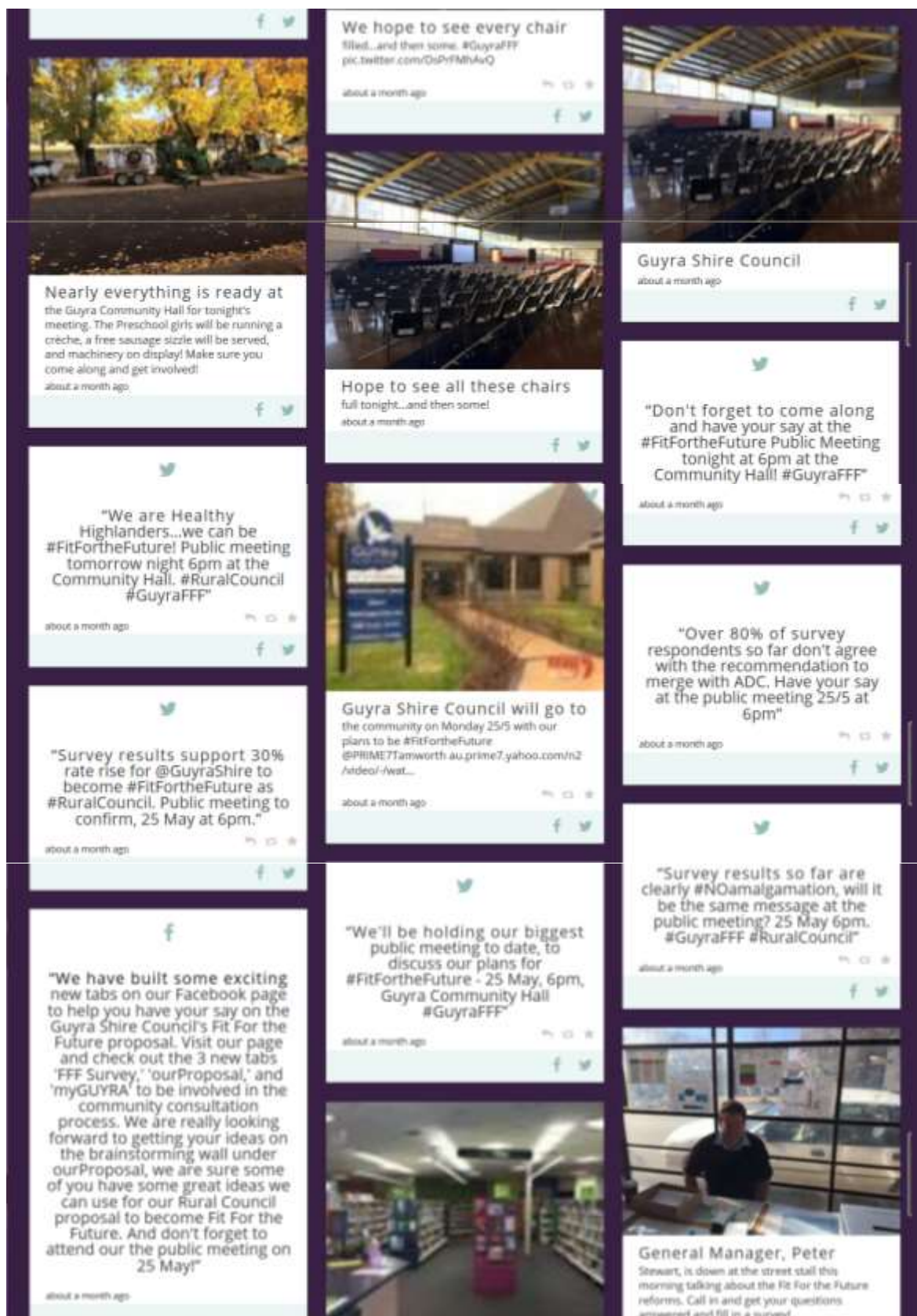
Social Media

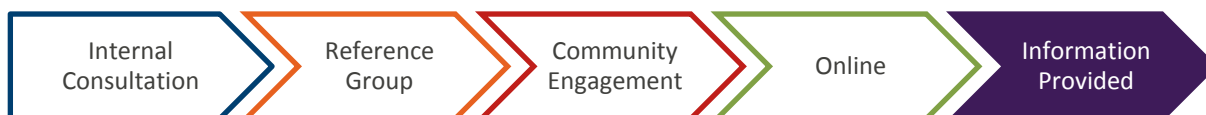
Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	Facebook	Online	Community	Ongoing
Inform Consult Involve Collaborate	Twitter	Online	Community	Ongoing

Council uses social media to engage Guyra Shire residents and ratepayers, and the wider community.









Information Provided

Information was developed and distributed to provide to community members who attended the public meetings and reference group meetings. Information packages were available for collection from Council's Administration Building, and also provided to all community members who attended any of the public forums or the reference group meetings.

Mail Out – Flyers

3 flyers were distributed relating to Fit For the Future, via an un-addressed bulk mail-out to 1820 households each.

NOVEMBER 2014

FIT FOR THE FUTURE

The NSW Government wants communities to have confidence that their council is financially sound, operating efficiently, and in a strong position to guide community growth and deliver quality services. Councils across NSW have been tasked with assessing their current position and submitting a 'Fit For the Future' proposal by 30 June 2015.

A Fit For the Future Council is one that is sustainable, efficient, effectively manages infrastructure and services, and has scale and capacity. The proposal is to be founded on one of three options to become 'Fit for the future'. These are:

Merger Proposal – to create stronger, bigger, regional centres.

Council Improvement Proposal – development of a plan to achieve the requirements under the 'Fit For the Future' reforms.

Rural Council Proposal – Councils with a current, or projected, population under 10,000 may be eligible to form a new type of Council.

Submissions are to be guided by the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel. The Guyra Shire has been recommended to merge with Armidale and/or form part of a Joint Organisation. The NSW Government will provide support and funding for Councils that become 'Fit For the Future'.

The Guyra Shire Council will be engaging with the community to ascertain the community's needs and desires into the future.

Council will be developing a portal on

myGUYRA.com

to provide information on the Fit For the Future process.

[illegible]

my**GUYRA**.com

 council@guyra.nsw.gov.au

 facebook.com/GuyraShireCouncil


twitter.com/GuyraShire
 or Mail
 PO 207, GUYRA NSW 2365



FIT FOR THE FUTURE

"We cannot solve a problem by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them"

Albert Einstein

top of the range

Each Council in NSW is to prepare a proposal to be 'Fit For the Future' by 30 June 2015. There were 3 templates to select from, voluntary amalgamation, stand alone, or rural council. Guyra Shire Council resolved to submit a proposal under the rural council template.

The rural council template recognises that small rural councils in NSW face unique challenges. The template allows councils who meet the criteria to show how they will improve performance within their current structure. This allows us to choose from solutions, developed through consultation, that particularly suit our community. There will be no change to the way that councils are named, nor mandated changes to operations.

Under the rural council proposal, there are 6 areas identified as possible improvement opportunities:

- Resource sharing with neighbouring councils and through regional Joint Organisations.
- Shared administration, the sharing of senior managers or administrative processes.
- Speciality services, for other councils to access.
- Streamlined governance, reducing the number of Councillors or Council Meetings
- Streamlined planning, regulation, and reporting.
- Service level reviews.

Guyra Shire Council will be developing a proposal that focusses on the areas of improvement that will enhance our efficiency, sustainability, and service to our community. Council will be engaging with the community to ascertain the community's needs and desires into the future.

NO CHANGE IS NOT AN OPTION

All members of the public, residents and ratepayers, are urged to attend the public meetings at each of the locations throughout the Shire. Show your support for the Guyra Shire Council to remain independent by attending one or on of the following meetings:

 **Wards Mistake**
Tennis Courts
11am

 **Guyra**
Community Hall
6pm



Tingha
Town Hall
6pm

May 27 Black Mountain Public School 6pm

 **Ben Lomond
Memorial Hall**
6pm

A meeting will also be held in Ebor, date to be confirmed.

You can also visit the Fit For the Future page on

myGUYRA.com

to get the latest information on the Fit For the Future process and join the online discussion.

The following questions specifically relate to the rural council proposal. Please complete, tear off, and return to Council by 18 May 2015. Full survey at www.surveymonkey.com/s/GuvraFFF

1. If it meant Guyra Shire could become sustainable and independent as a rural council, would you accept a 30% rate rise?

2. What changes to the Guyra Shire Council would you accept, to achieve efficiencies as a rural council? You may select more than one answer.

- ☐ Rate rise
- ☐ Increased user charges on community facilities
- ☐ Invest in profitable business activities
- ☐ Reduce number of Councillors from 6 to 5
- ☐ Reduce the number of Council meetings annually
- ☐ Shared senior staff with another Council
- ☐ Reduced service levels on roads
- ☐ Reduced services levels on recreational facilities
- ☐ Reduced service levels for community services

What services do you think need to be retained locally, and what services could be provided by another (outside) organisation?

another (outside) organisation?	Local	Other
Water	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sewerage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parks	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recreational Grounds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Economic Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Libraries	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Roads	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Regional Roads	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health and Community Care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Weeds	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ratting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Planning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Waste	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

MAY 2015



PUBLIC MEETING

Fit For the Future Local Government Review

*We urge you to attend a
public meeting
to discuss the future of
Guyra Shire Council*

Further information can be obtained by visiting
<http://www.myguyra.com/#/fff/csls>

**Monday,
25 May, 2015**

Guyra Community Hall
Commencing at 6:00pm

Information Packages

At each of the community engagement meetings, information packages were provided to attendees. The information packages contained the most up-to-date information available to ensure participants were well informed throughout the process.



FAQ

FAQ information was prepared to assist the community in understanding the process, as determined by the Office of Local Government. The information was extracted from the Office of Local Government's FAQ, as available on www.fitforthefuture.nsw.gov.au and tailored to directly reflect the position of Guyra Shire Council.

Media

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Inform	Briefing for media & distribution of media releases	Mayor's Office	Regional Media	26 November 2014
Inform	Run radio ads calling for submissions. Seek interviews with ABC Regional, 2NZ, and Local FM stations in Inverell and Armidale.	NA	Radio listeners	May 2015
Inform	Public Forum promotion: send Media Alert and seek interviews/advertisement placements with radio, TV and print outlets across the region.	Region	Community members	May 2015

0730 ABC New England North West News

25 MAY 2015

Story content:

Guyra Shire Council will seek support to raise rates at a public meeting tonight. Mayor Hans Hietbrink says 60 per cent of surveyed residents have indicated they would accept a rate rise of 30 per cent if the Council remains independent. He said the community has expressed a strong desire to retain its independence through the Fit For the Future reform consultations. But he has warned that, with independence, may come rate rises. "We have been at a disadvantage for many years, under rate pegging, as have most Councils. And rate rises, or Special Rate Variations are the norm in many ways to maintain financial availability. Costs are going up and rate pegging is not keeping pace with the increased costs of providing services."

The Guyra Argus

Is Guyra Shire Fit for the Future?

SEPT. 18, 2014

The NSW government is offering financial incentives for voluntary council amalgamations as part of a plan to make Local Government more financially secure. The government released its 'Fit for the Future' package last week as a response to the Independent Review into Local Government which was released earlier in the year.

Guyra Shire Council General Manager Peter Stewart said that while detail is short at the moment, he has doubts whether Guyra can make a case to remain a stand-alone entity. Mr Stewart said that he hopes a meeting to be held in Armidale next Monday will give more details. Under the package, councils will be required to make a submission by 30 June 2015 on how they plan to be Fit for the Future. It will be assessed by independent experts against independently-set criteria.

"Guyra needs to show that it can be sustainable into the future which is something that can never be achieved with our rate base," he said. "There appears to be no option to assess the impact of the loss of local representation or local decision making. We are not alone. Of the 152 councils in NSW two thirds won't meet the criteria," he said. "Our close geographical connection and community of interest with Armidale means we a high priority for a merger. This is not what Guyra wanted, and while there will be benefits, there will also be losses if this goes ahead," he said. "We have no option – if we fight it we won't win and we will be bigger losers."

He said the Council would contemplate the proposal, especially given its current financial state. But if it was to amalgamate he wanted to see it done properly and include a review of shire boundaries. "If you don't get it right we don't want to have to fix it in the next 10 or 20 years," Mr Stewart said. He was highly supportive of more regional co-operation among neighbouring Northern Tablelands councils, noting the airport, roads, water and waste as areas currently being discussed by delegates.

Member for Northern Tablelands Adam Marshall said he wants to continue to work closely with all councils in the Northern Tablelands and build on the strengthening relationships in the region to ensure every council is Fit for the Future. "We've come a long way in the last 12 months – we have elevated our thinking and now have a regional focus, which is important to tackle the big issues and making savings. This package presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve what we do and the services we offer to our communities and modernise local government." The MP said that Councils which become Fit for the Future will have access to a range of further initiatives to help provide improved services and infrastructure, including:

- access to a State borrowing facility to fund local infrastructure;
- more flexibility with procurement and simplified reporting;
- access to a streamlined IPART process for setting rates; and
- eligibility for additional planning powers.

The Guyra Argus

Decision day looms for Council

APRIL 23, 2015

Guyra Shire Council has commenced an extensive community consultation program to determine the best way forward for the community under the NSW Government's Fit for the Future (FFF) reforms.



At Monday's meeting opinions were divided over how to proceed under the NSW Government Fit for the Future initiative.

The FFF process requires councils across NSW to develop a proposal to meet the benchmarks set by the NSW Government. Council currently meets only one of the seven FFF benchmarks and requires considerable changes to the way it operates, the rates it charges, and its revenue sources, to even begin to work toward meeting the other six.

There are three alternatives under consideration - voluntary amalgamation, council improvement or rural council and a decision will be made at the next meeting of Guyra Shire Council on Monday, April 27.

"The task involves assessing our current position, determining what our future looks like, and setting strategies to get there," General Manager Peter Stewart said. "No matter what option Council selects on Monday, there will be big changes in our community,".

A review conducted by the Independent Local Government Review Panel in 2013 recommended that Guyra Shire Council amalgamate with Armidale Dumaresq Council and the recently re-elected NSW Government have not ruled out forced amalgamations.

"However, we have an opportunity to put forward a proposal to stand alone either through the Council improvement process, meeting the benchmarks by 2020; or under the rural council proposal, where we can choose solutions appropriate to our unique community to show how we will improve performance within our current structure," Mr Stewart said

A reference group meeting which was held on Monday April 20 left little doubt that it is important to our community to retain autonomy and local representation. They examined the current situation and considered the three available options.

At the end of the night a poll saw one vote for amalgamation, 14 votes for council improvement and 14 votes for rural council. Councillors were also split between the two stand-alone proposals.

Council will now weigh up the two stand-alone options, and develop a robust proposal to be Fit For the Future. The decision will be made at a public Council meeting, commencing at 8:30am next Monday. The community are able to attend this meeting and observe the debate on the options.

“Once we receive the direction from the Council as to which template we complete, we will be calling on the community to get behind their Council and help develop solutions that will ensure we can prove that we are Fit For the Future,” Mr Stewart concluded.

Following the decision, Council staff and Councillors will begin working with the community to develop the proposal which will then go on public exhibition in May. You can also get involved by completing a survey, and participating in one of the public meetings scheduled over the coming months.

To complete the survey click the following link <http://www.myguyra.com/#!survey/c1lis>

Opinion - What do Councillors think?

APRIL 23, 2015

A tough decision faces councillors as they seek to be Fit for the Future. Unknown is a worry. I would like to see Council remain alone but cannot see it being viable. I cannot see much savings by reducing Councillors to 5 and only having 6 meetings a year. 2nd choice would be Rural Council but the unknown is a worry.

Cr Audrey McArdle

This is the toughest decision that I have had to make as a councillor as its affects will change Guyra as we know it. We have been given three options from the State Government to become fit for the future.

1# Amalgamate with Armidale (not an option as far as I'm concerned. But, you need to be aware if this is forced upon us will no doubt include a rate rise as our rates are substantially lower than Armidale's now and we will also lose representation)

2# Council improvement model or stand-alone (a viable option that will require a rate rise and in my opinion some dramatic changes to services provided by Council and I have to ask myself if that's a community worth living in)

3# Rural council model (also a viable option but will also require a rate rise and probably some cuts to services although maybe not as dramatic. This model for the moment is essentially the same as the stand alone model with a longer time frame to reform our operations however I feel this may only be a short term solution and we could be having the same fight for our independence as a Council in the future again)

I think it's important that the community of Guyra Shire realise that no matter which option is selected on Monday that it will mean a rate rise, but I think we are better to have a rate rise on our own terms than be forced to amalgamate and have the rate rise imposed on us by a neighbouring council.

Most importantly we need our community to support the Council's decision on Monday whatever it may be because without your support we don't stand a chance of remaining independent from Armidale.

Cr Dean Heagney

The community reference group has indicated strongly that a merger with Armidale Dumaresq is not desired. While the Rural Council model is one approach to remaining autonomous, there are still some uncertainties associated with this approach. Issues such as the shape and size of Council's staff, the oversight of the outdoor workforce, and the governance structure are just a few. Similarly, to pursue a "stand alone" model based on the Council Improvement program will be very difficult. Council is now faced with a difficult decision, one based on a great deal of community consultation and analysis of our financial sustainability. We ask our community to work with us as we seek the best outcome for our Shire.

Cr Hans Hietbrink

This is the most important decision that we have had to make since coming on to Council. Fit For the Future. Stand Alone or Rural.

Rural I am very comfortable with, we tick most boxes in the template – better than the requirement in the population growth. However, I am not completely confident that we are going to be treated equally by the Government if this is the decision.

Popular consensus seems to be stand alone, however we do not tick near enough boxes, but my understanding is we have until 2020 to make drastic changes to make this work.

If we don't get this decision right we will score amalgamation. I could accept amalgamation provided it included Inverell, Glen Innes, Guyra, Armidale, and Uralla, making a large rural council with almost equal rural and residential ratepayers.

Cr Dot Vickery

Once again Guyra is in a battle to maintain its autonomy. On Monday 27th April myself and the other five Councillors must resolve how to respond to the State Government's recommendation from the Panel of Review into Local Government. The Panel recommended that Guyra be voluntarily amalgamated with Armidale Dumaresq Council. This appears unacceptable to a large majority of our community as it is to all six Councillors.

We are therefore left with one of two choices to respond to the State Government's demand in order to show we are "Fit for the Future." To follow what I believe is the clear will of our community, Councillors must resolve to base our response either to remain as a Stand Alone Council or to become a Rural Council. To give credit to a Stand Alone submission we must prove that within 4 years we can achieve a number of Benchmarks set by the State Government. The present criteria for a Rural Council will still allow our Community to control its own destiny. The risk is that State Government may at some time in the future decide to reduce the authority and responsibilities of a Rural Council.

To meet the criteria for a Stand Alone Council we will need Community support for a total of 80% rate rise over 4 years. In the case of a Rural Council I expect we will need the Community to grant a 30% rate rise in the ensuing year. To do nothing will result in amalgamation and through the ensuing rate adjustments would mean a rate increase in the order of 60%

Either a Stand Alone or a Rural Council, I believe, will satisfy the public's passion for us to remain as an autonomous Local Government area. What your Council needs is that the Community gets behind this by going to the Council website and filling out the survey.

Again we need to be unified in this fight for continued existence. As a Councillor I encourage everyone to back this by turning up at the public forums and expressing your support. With significant Community support we will win this battle.

Cr Lee Martin

At next Monday's Council meeting, the six councillors will have to decide on one of the three options under the NSW's Fit For the Future. While I may be repeating what my other councillors have stated, the three options are; Council Merger Proposal, Council Improvement Proposal and thirdly a Rural Council proposal.

Under the Council Merger options, our Council has already been identified for a merger with the Armidale Dumaresq Council in a recent review by the Independent Local Government Review Panel submitted to the Office of Local Government. I do not support a merger with Armidale Dumaresq alone. If there has to be a merger, than I believe a merger with more neighbouring councils such as Inverell, Glen Innes, Armidale Dumaresq, Uralla and Walcha would be a better option.

I am currently undecided on either the Council Improvement, or the Rural Council option. Either option will require significant changes to Councils' operations and income. Ultimately, I would like to see Guyra determine its own destiny and at the moment, both options provide this facility.

To make this rather difficult decision, we need your views. Please contact the Councillors, or contact Council staff.

Cr Simon Murray

The Guyra Argus

Guyra Fights for its future

MAY 22, 2015



The future of Guyra Shire Council will be discussed with the community at a Public Meeting, to be held on Monday, 25 May 2015 from 6.00pm at the Guyra Community Hall.

Councillors urge as many people as possible to come along to this meeting, enjoy a free sausage sizzle and talk about our future.

Guyra Shire Council has resolved to complete the Rural Council proposal under the Fit For the Future process and is expecting a large public response at the meeting.

So far the survey results have indicated that more than 80% of Shire residents surveyed are against the recommendation made by the Independent Local Government Review Panel to amalgamate with Armidale Dumaresq Council, and more than 60% would accept a 30% rate rise if the Council was to remain independent.

A cavalcade of Council's plant and equipment – from graders to mowers – will be lit-up and on display outside the Community Hall, demonstrating the extent of Council's services and the critical role it plays in providing employment and governance for the Shire.

The evening will also provide an opportunity for the community to engage with Council staff to better understand the extensive number of services provided with limited staff. Mayor of Guyra Shire Council, Cr Hans Hietbrink, said the threat of amalgamation is a real possibility and jobs and services are on the line. "The community has expressed its strong desire to retain its independence, however with independence may come rate rises and operational changes," Cr Hietbrink said.

This meeting is an opportunity to explain the outcomes of becoming a 'Rural Council', get further public reaction to the changes and share ideas in order to put our best foot forward to the State Government.

“We want to show that the community may be small, but we are strong, united and will fight for independence.”

Government shows its hand on forced amalgamations The NSW Government showed its hand last week after the Minister for Local Government told Parliament that the Government would not support a motion against forced amalgamations.

This admission came during a debate on a motion by Independent Sydney MP Alex Greenwich, that: “This House opposes the amalgamation of councils that are financially sustainable and have the support of their communities”.

Following this disclosure, the Argus sought comment from both Mayor Hans Hietbrink and the General Manager of Guyra Shire Council, Peter Stewart. “It was inevitable that the current Government would not commit to a ‘no forced amalgamations’ position.

To do so would constrain the government in implementing a reform agenda across Local Government. That, however, does not provide Councils with any feeling of security. Guyra Shire Council has faced the prospect of a forced amalgamation on a number of occasions.

Each time in the past Council has been able to retain its autonomy through putting forward a strong case for non-amalgamation, coupled with very strong community support for remaining as we are.

I think that under the ‘Fit for the Future’ scenario we will be under much greater pressure to be amalgamated as per the recommendations of the Local Government Review panel. For this reason it is imperative that members of the community attend the various public meetings being held throughout the Shire over the next week and get behind Council in our efforts to build a submission that conveys our wishes,” Mayor Hans Hietbrink stated. General Manager of Guyra Shire Council, Peter Stewart said:

“This is the first time in over a decade that State government policy is not ruling out forced amalgamations. This was not the current Government’s position prior to the March State election so it is reasonable to conclude that a change in policy position is a clear signal that some councils are being looked at for forced amalgamation.

From a Guyra council perspective and with the recommendation from the latest state review for an amalgamation with Armidale Dumaresq Council, our community once again must show by community support backed by a business case that we do not want this merger.

We have well over 80% support from surveys not wanting to merge with Armidale Dumaresq, with comments highlighting that we are a vastly different cultural and economic community and therefore want to retain our local democracy and identity. To strengthen the case we must have big numbers turn up on next Monday evening, 25 May at the Guyra community centre at 6.00pm and at all our villages during the week. A packed community centre and rural villages supporting our Rural Council submission and saying NO to an amalgamation is critical in validating council’s submission to the NSW Government.”

The Guyra Argus

From the Mayor's Desk

MAY 28, 2015

Council has prepared a draft Fit For the Future submission that outlines how Council will achieve the benchmarks under the Rural Council template. Council will explore these options over the next four weeks in consultation with the Guyra Shire community.

We are calling for submissions to the proposed activities, and other ideas for ways Guyra Shire Council can deliver efficiencies and be more financially sustainable.

There are multiple ways you can have your say on the draft proposal, or any ideas you have for the future of Guyra Shire:

- Complete the survey online at
- www.surveymonkey.com/s/GuyraFFF
- Talk to your Councillors
- Send in a written submission
- Let us know on social media, we are on www.facebook.com/GuyraShireCouncil and www.twitter.com/GuyraShire
- Come and talk to staff at the Council
- Phone 6770 7100
- Email council@guyra.nsw.gov.au
- Join the online forum on www.myguyra.com

It doesn't matter how you get your message across, we want to hear from you.

This is one of the most important changes to local government in many years and will certainly change the way we operate into the future.

More information is available from <http://www.myguyra.com/#!fff/csIs>.

Public Forums

MAY 28, 2015



It was very heartening for us to see nearly 300 people at the Guyra public meeting held on 25 May. The community stood up and showed their support for Guyra Shire Council.

We polled the community on three important aspects of our submission under the Fit For the Future reforms:

- Do you agree with the recommendation for Guyra Shire Council to amalgamate with Armidale Dumaresq Council? With the response being almost unanimously NO.
- Do you support Guyra Shire Council's decision to complete the Rural Council template? Very strong support was evidenced for Council to complete this template.
- Do you support a 30% rate rise for Guyra Shire Council to remain independent as a Rural Council? Approximately 97% of respondents would accept a 30% rate rise to remain independent.

These responses endorse Council's decision to complete the Rural Council template, and give us the community's backing to put forward a strong case to retain our local identity and representation.

Similar responses were received at our Community Meetings at Wards Mistake, Tingha, and Black Mountain. I expect a similar response at the Ben Lomond Community Meeting tonight.

I thank all those members of the Shire community who have attended these public meetings in order to be informed and to have their say on the future of our Council.

Our submission to remain as an autonomous council under the Rural Council template will be strengthened by the clear show of support from our community. That support is evident and I thank you for it.

The Armidale Express

Glen Innes grab for Guyra land

APRIL 24, 2015

GLEN INNES is making a land grab for parts of Guyra should New England councils be forced to merge.

Under the plan, Ben Lomond, Llangothlin and Backwater would fall under Glen Innes Severn Shire Council, rather than an amalgamated Guyra and Armidale Dumaresq Council. Glen Innes Mayor Colin Price yesterday defended the move, saying those communities were more closely associated with Glen Innes.

“This is not a predatory move, rather, we are making ourselves fit for the future,” Cr Price said.

He has held “informal discussions” with Armidale Dumaresq general manager Glenn Wilcox. Discussions have also been held with Guyra Shire Mayor Hans Hietbrink.

Under a local government reform package, councils are required to prepare and submit a proposal by June on how they intend to become “fit for the future”, with financial incentives for those councils that agree to mergers.

Guyra councillors are scheduled to discuss their response on Monday. While no council in the district wants to merge, a possible scenario would be a merger between Uralla, Armidale Dumaresq and Guyra.

Cr Hietbrink said Ben Lomond was part of Guyra Shire.

“Should we be forced into an amalgamation with Armidale, I would see the whole of Guyra Shire amalgamating, including Ben Lomond,” Cr Hietbrink said.

Armidale Dumaresq deputy mayor Herman Beyersdorf said: “We need to be satisfied residents in those areas would want to become a part of Glen Innes or a new New England Council.

“Also, that such a move might not disadvantage any planned enlarged new council.”

The Armidale Express

Secret meeting over merger

MAY 22, 2015

COUNCILLORS from Armidale Dumaresq and Guyra Shire met in secret yesterday to debate a possible merger.

Guyra Mayor Hans Hietbrink said before the meeting jobs and services would be on the line should a merger with Armidale Dumaresq go ahead.

He has organised a public meeting on Monday for Guyra ratepayers to discuss the shire's future.

It follows a survey conducted earlier this year showed 80 per cent of ratepayers opposed any merger.

Sixty per cent of those polled said they would willingly foot a 30 per cent rates rise to remain independent.

Guyra Shire has confirmed that it will bid to become a rural council under state guidelines on councils' futures.

In accordance with the NSW Government's Fit for the Future reforms Guyra Council must demonstrate rural council characteristics to remain an independent council.

Cr Hietbrink said the meeting with Armidale Dumaresq Council "went very well but was not a decision-making meeting".

He confirmed the two councils discussed various respective proposals and would be supporting each other.

Cr Hietbrink also said there would be "more meetings in the future before the submission deadline".

Deputy Mayor Councillor Herman Beyersdorf of Armidale Dumaresq Council said the meeting was "informal and private" and would not comment on its proceedings .

The Guyra Fit for the Future public meeting will be held on Monday at 6pm at the Guyra Community Hall.

The Armidale Express

Guyra votes no to Armidale amalgamation

MAY 26, 2015



A PUBLIC Forum held last night in Guyra has overwhelmingly supported the preferred option of Guyra Shire Council to remain independent. Close to 300 people were present to hear details of the proposal which is due to be submitted by the end of June.

Three key questions were put to the community at the forum which was organised in response to the NSW governments Fit for the Future initiative.

On the question of an amalgamation with Armidale Dumaresq council a sea of red cards indicated a resounding no vote.

In total contrast the question of support for council's preferred option of remaining an independent rural council saw the green cards raised by those present.

The final question about whether to accept a 30% increase in rates as part of the Rural Council proposal also saw majority support from those present. However, there was some opposition to this move with 9 votes recorded against the rise.

Guyra says, 'we will not be moved'

MAY 28, 2015

AT LEAST 300 people have given overwhelming support for Guyra Shire Council to remain independent, and indicated they would accept a hefty rate rise in order to achieve that.

The public forum was held in the town on Monday night to discuss the council's submission regarding the NSW government's Fit for the Future reforms.

Mayor Hans Hietbrink said yesterday he was "heartened" by the large turnout – representing more than 10 per cent of the population of Guyra – and the crowd's commitment to rejecting any suggestion of amalgamation with Armidale Dumaresq Council.

In the final report of the Independent Local Government Review Panel last year, it was recommended that Guyra merge with its larger neighbour, but on Monday night that was very firmly rejected.

The meeting instead endorsed the council pursuing the Rural Councils option within the reforms, whereby small councils could maintain their independence, but outsource certain services and maintain close alliances with neighbouring councils.

Cr Hietbrink said Guyra Shire would not meet the criteria for standing alone entirely, but he believed they had a good case for winning approval under the Rural Council option.

He said he was confident the government was committed to that option, despite concerns earlier this year that it had "backed away" from that avenue of reform.

"We believe it's back on the table now and that they've tightened up the model," Cr Hietbrink said.

He said he wasn't surprised by the community's rejection of a merger, saying residents felt that "culturally and socially we're a different population" from Armidale Dumaresq.

The overwhelming endorsement for council to pursue a 30 per cent special rate variation in order to cement its future viability also came as little surprise, the mayor said.

Cr Hietbrink said it was a reflection of the amount of concern in the community about the threat of a forced merger.

"They realise we can't sustain our council without that (sort of rate rise)," he said.

On Tuesday night the council held a forum in Tingha. Last night councillors and staff met with residents at Black Mountain and today it's the turn of Ben Lomond.

The councils' submissions under the Fit for the Future reforms must be made by the end of June.



GUYRA RESIDENTS SUPPORT COUNCIL'S INDEPENDENCE

MAY 26, 2015

There's been overwhelming support for Guyra Shire Council to remain independent.

Around 300 people attended a public meet last night, where the majority said they were against an amalgamation with Armidale-Dumaresq Council.

Residents showed their support for council's preferred option of operating under the rural council model.

The majority also agreed to accept a 30 per cent rate rise, under the rural council proposal.



PRIME NEWS

MAY 26, 2015

Can Guyra be fit for the future?

Submission of Proposal

Level of Engagement	Method	Location	Targeted Stakeholders	Dates /Venues
Collaborate	Draft Submission on Public Exhibition	Online and provided in print	Community	Draft submission placed on public exhibition from 25 May to 22 June 2015
Empower	Final submission	Online	Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal Office of Local Government	Submitted on 30 June 2015

A draft submission outlining Council's decision to complete the Rural Council template and presenting a range of options available to achieve the Fit For the Future benchmarks was adopted by Council on 25 May 2015. This draft proposal formed the framework for discussions with the community at the public meetings held 24-28 May 2015 throughout the Shire. This provided the community with an opportunity to collaborate and develop future plans for the Guyra Shire, as per the below extract from the draft document:

Preamble

This draft document has been prepared for use in consultation with the Guyra Shire community for the purposes of preparing a submission to the NSW State Government under the Fit For the Future Local Government reforms. Council has resolved to complete the Rural Council template, as it is recognised by the NSW Government that "small rural communities need a new approach to local governance that recognises their unique challenges and characteristics."

The document provides a considered list of actionable activities that Council can undertake to meet the Fit For the Future benchmarks, however further information will be developed and items included may change prior to the final submission. Council is calling on the community to consider the 6 options for improvement under the Rural Council template and make suggestions or ideas for improvement to help strengthen the case for Guyra Shire to remain an autonomous, decision making, local government authority.

Council welcomes the community's input into the development of the proposal, and submissions will be received until 5pm on 22 June 2015.

SUBMISSIONS can be made IN WRITING or:

www.myguyra.com and get involved in the online discussion.

myGUYRA



02 6770 7100 council@guyra.nsw.gov.au facebook.com/GuyraShireCouncil twitter.com/GuyraShire

The final submission was completed and submitted to IPART via their online submission process, www.fitforthefuture.nsw.gov.au. The submission was also posted publically to empower the community and demonstrate the role they played in preparing the submission.