



Insight for
Business & Government

Willoughby City Council Special Rating Options Survey

Prepared for



by
IRIS Research Ltd

December 2013

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1 INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1 BACKGROUND	4
1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	4
1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	4
1.4 SURVEY RESPONSE	5
SURVEY RESULTS.....	6
2 IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE.....	7
3 SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION.....	9
3.1 COMMUNITY PREFERENCE.....	9
3.2 REDUCTION IN SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE.....	10
3.3 CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE SUPPORT FOR 'SUSTAINABLE SERVICES WITH SPECIAL RATE VARIATION' WOULD BE PROVIDED	11
4 PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES	12
5 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS	14
5.1 GENDER	14
5.2 LOCALITY.....	14
5.3 RATEPAYER	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the Willoughby City Council special rate variation survey, 2013. IRIS Research was commissioned by Council to conduct a comprehensive telephone-based survey among the area's residents. The survey sought to gauge community support and reaction to the proposed rating options.

The key finding of the survey was 60.5% of residents surveyed in Willoughby City supported a special rate variation to keep assets and services at acceptable levels in line with the expectations of the community.

This left 39.6% of respondents that supported the 'Business as Usual' option with no special rate variation and the need to reduce services in the future.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

IRIS Research was commissioned by Willoughby City Council to undertake a survey of residents within the Willoughby City. The survey aimed to canvass the community on funding options being considered by Council for the maintenance and upgrade of community assets such as playgrounds, sporting fields, footpaths, local roads, storm water drainage and buildings.

1.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this survey were;

- To determine what the community viewed as important community assets.
- Assess the level of support for a special rate variation to cover the gap in funding needed to keep assets and services at acceptable levels in line with expectations of the community.

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted following an information package being mailed out to all resident rate payers explaining Council's proposal of an application for a special rates variation. The questionnaire was only administered to those residents that were familiar with the special rate variation proposals and the reasons why Council is seeking the variation.

The questionnaire was administered using IRIS's CATI facility. CATI facilitates strategies to combat non response using time shifted retries for

non contacts and a callback facility for the convenience of respondents. Adult decision makers were randomly selected across the local government area in proportion to population densities ensuring a geographic spread.

1.4 SURVEY RESPONSE

Interviews were conducted during the week commencing 15th December 2013 between 4.00 and 8.30 p.m.

A final sample of 507 adult decision makers was achieved. The maximum error on proportion for the total sample is +/- 4.4%.

The following indicates the key survey findings.

SURVEY RESULTS

2 IMPORTANCE OF INFRASTRUCTURE

Respondents were first asked the following;

...how important are specific types of infrastructure to you on a scale of 1 to 5?

Table 2-1 Importance Ratings for Infrastructure (n=507)

Type of Infrastructure (rank order)	n/r	Importance Rating (%)			Mean Score (out of 5)
		Low (1-2)	Medium (3)	High (4-5)	
Local Roads	0.0	3.4	9.7	87.0	4.43
Condition of Footpaths	0.0	2.6	12.8	84.6	4.38
Stormwater Drainage	1.0	4.1	12.6	82.2	4.32
Parks, playgrounds and reserves	0.8	8.9	17.6	72.7	4.02
Sporting fields	0.2	17.6	23.9	58.4	3.64
Community buildings and halls	0.8	16.6	33.5	49.1	3.51

...how important is it for Council to renew and maintain each type of infrastructure at an acceptable level.

Table 2-2 Importance Ratings for Renewing and Maintaining Infrastructure (n=507)

Type of Infrastructure (rank order)	n/r	Importance Rating (%)			Mean Score (out of 5)
		Low (1-2)	Medium (3)	High (4-5)	
Local Roads	0.6	1.6	10.1	87.7	4.48
Condition of Footpaths	0.6	2.4	9.9	87.2	4.43
Stormwater Drainage	1.0	3.2	13.6	82.2	4.33
Parks, playgrounds and reserves	0.8	7.5	20.1	71.6	4.02
Sporting fields	1.0	14.4	23.9	60.8	3.72
Community buildings and halls	1.2	12.8	28.8	57.2	3.70

Key findings;

- o Mean scores indicated local roads, condition of footpaths and storm water drainage were rated as the most important of the infrastructure assets listed.

- o Consistent with the above results, residents indicated a high level of importance for Council to renew and maintain local roads, footpaths and storm water drainage.

- o Consistent with the overall lower mean importance scores for community buildings, it is noted that a lower 57.2% of the community provided a high importance rating for their maintenance and renewal.

3 SUPPORT FOR PROPOSED SPECIAL RATE VARIATION

3.1 COMMUNITY PREFERENCE

All respondents were provided with a detailed description of the proposals as outlined in the information brochure and were asked:

Of the options proposed by Council which option do you most support?

Table 3.1 Support for Special Rate Variation Options

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Business as Usual	201	39.6	39.6	39.6
Sustainable services with special rate variation	306	60.4	60.4	100.0

Key findings:

- o 60.4% of residents surveyed indicated they would prefer a special rate variation rather than the business as usual rate peg increase.

3.2 REDUCTION IN SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The 201 residents (39.6%) who supported the “Business as Usual” option were asked to identify what services and infrastructure they recommend being reduced as a result.

The following responses were provided

- Community buildings (40 mentions)
- Sports fields (26 mentions)
- Council administration (24 mentions)
- Parks (18 mentions)
- All services (8 mentions)
- Roads (6 mentions)
- Community Services (6 mentions)
- Non-basic (6 mentions)
- Footpaths (5 mentions)
- Councilor trips (2 mentions)
- Incinerator (2 mentions)

66 of the 201 respondents did not identify any specific service or infrastructure they would like to see reduced.

3.3 CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE SUPPORT FOR 'SUSTAINABLE SERVICES WITH SPECIAL RATE VARIATION' WOULD BE PROVIDED

A further question was asked to respondents who supported the 'Business as usual' option on whether they could identify any circumstances where they may support 'Sustainable services with special rate variation' option.

151 of the 201 residents that opted for the 'Business as usual' option indicated they could not identify any circumstance where their support would shift to the 'Sustainable services with special rate variation' option.

The following responses were provided as circumstances where respondents would support the special rates variation.

- o If evidence is provided that Council is operating efficiently (8 mentions)
- o If the increase were smaller (8 mentions)
- o If there was surety that the money would be spent on basic infrastructure (7 mentions)
- o If basic infrastructure declined sufficiently (7 mentions)
- o In the event of a major one-off infrastructure project (4 mentions)
- o If there was a transparent, specific plan for the spending (4 mentions)
- o In an emergency (3 mentions)
- o If rise was in line with CPI (2 mentions)
- o If reviewed later and adjusted accordingly (1 mention)
- o If catch up and reduce later (1 mention)
- o If cut services and still short (1 mention)
- o If beneficial to the community (1 mention)

- o If there will be an impact in my local community (1 mention)
- o In exchange for more public transport (1 mention)

4 PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

This section explored the respondent's previous participation in community engagement activities facilitated by Willoughby City Council.

The 2012 Customer Satisfaction telephone survey

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	20	3.9	3.9	3.9
No	487	96.1	96.1	100.0

Public meetings on community assets 2013

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	34	6.7	6.7	6.7
No	473	93.3	93.3	100.0

Citizens' Panel sessions June 2013

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	8	1.6	1.6	1.6
No	499	98.4	98.4	100.0

'Have your say' online forum

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	37	7.3	7.3	7.3
No	470	92.7	92.7	100.0

Key finding;

- 77 (15.2%) of the survey respondents had participated in one or more Council run community engagement activities prior to the survey.
- The 'Have your say' online forum was the best supported with 37 (7.3%) respondents reporting having been involved.

5 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

5.1 Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	227	44.8	44.8	44.8
Female	280	55.2	55.2	100.0
Total	507	100.0	100.0	

5.2 Locality

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Artarmon	50	9.9	9.9	9.9
Castle Cove	25	4.9	4.9	14.8
Castlecrag	32	6.3	6.3	21.1
Chatswood	131	25.8	25.8	46.9
Chatswood West	5	1.0	1.0	47.9
Lane Cove North	12	2.4	2.4	50.3
Middle Cove	18	3.6	3.6	53.8
Naremburn	45	8.9	8.9	62.7
North Willoughby	19	3.7	3.7	66.5
Northbridge	66	13.0	13.0	79.5
St Leonards	1	.2	.2	79.7
Willoughby	94	18.5	18.5	98.2
Willoughby East	9	1.8	1.8	100.0
Total	507	100.0	100.0	

5.3 Ratepayer

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Pay Council rates ourselves	494	97.4	97.4	97.4
Land lord pays Council rates	13	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	507	100.0	100.0	

INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SUMMARY

ATTACHMENTS:	2013/2014 SPECIAL RATE VARIATION COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SUMMARY DETAILS OF INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY SUBMISSIONS (DISTRIBUTED SEPARATELY)
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER:	TRACEY CROUCH - CORPORATE SUPPORT AND PERFORMANCE DIRECTOR TONY PIZZUTO - FINANCIAL SERVICES DIRECTOR
AUTHOR:	DARIUS TURNER – CORPORATE PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE CO-ORDINATOR
CITY STRATEGY LINK:	6.3.1 COUNCIL MAINTAINS A STRONG SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL POSITION
MEETING DATE:	3 NOVEMBER 2014

Purpose of Report

To inform Council of the feedback received through community consultation regarding the proposed Infrastructure Levy for 2015/16.

Background

In November 2012 Council began an extensive consultation program to engage with the community about the subject of community assets and the levels of service expected in relation to these assets. This consultation culminated by asking the community if they would support the option of a Special Rate Variation in order to maintain assets at the expected level of service as outlined in Council's Asset Management Plans. Details of this consultation can be found in the report from 24 February 2014 *Special Rate Variation Community Consultation Summary* (attached). Ultimately, Council resolved not to make an application to IPART (Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal) for a Special Rate Variation in 2014/15.

On 19 July 2014 Councillors and senior staff attended a workshop to discuss Council's financial and asset planning as well as options to address the identified gap in funds required to maintain Council's assets in the long term. Following this workshop, Council resolved on 4 August 2014 to commence community consultation on a proposed Infrastructure Levy. This report details the extent of this consultation as well as a summary of feedback received.

Discussion

Table 1 – Responses in favour of the various scenarios received during the Infrastructure Levy Community Consultation.

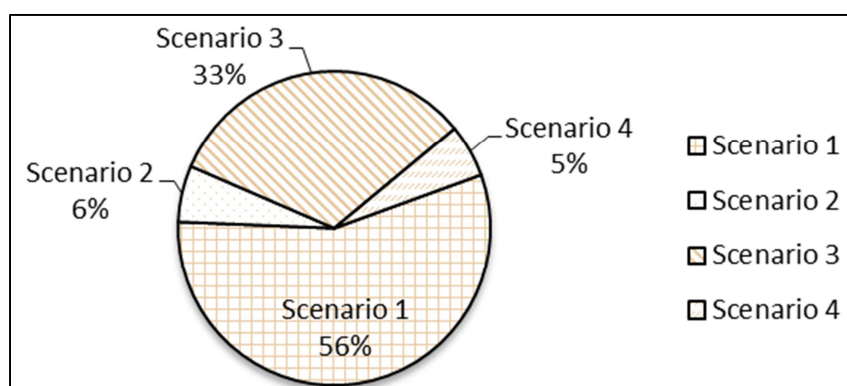


Table 2 – Breakdown of responses in favour of the various scenarios received during the Infrastructure Levy Community Consultation by submission method.

	Mail, Email, Fax	Online Submissions	Total submissions in favour
Scenario 1 - Normal rate peg for 7 years. Does not provide additional funding to reduce renewal gap.	28	126	154 (56%)
Scenario 2 - One off 5% plus normal rate peg in 2015/2016 followed by normal rate peg for 6 years. Leaves a shortfall of more than 20% of required funding.	3	13	16 (6%)
Scenario 3 - 4.5% plus normal rate peg in 2015/2016 followed by 2% plus normal rate peg in 2016/2017 followed by normal rate peg for 5 years. This scenario meets the renewal gap over the seven year period.	14	75	89 (33%)
Scenario 4 - 5% plus normal rate peg in 2015/2016 followed by 1% plus normal rate peg in 2016/2017 followed by normal rate peg for 5 years. Leaves a shortfall in funding of 5%.	1	14	15 (5%)
Total submissions received	46	228	274

Council also received 7 submissions which did not indicate which Scenario was supported.

In addition to the consultation results noted above, Council also undertook extensive consultation in 2013, with the results appearing below in Table 3. Total submissions received in the most recent consultation was 274, while there were 1164 submissions received in 2013, a total of 1438 submissions.

Table 3 – Responses received during Phase 3 of community consultation on the proposed Special Rate Variation in 2013/14. This information appeared in the Council report 24 February 2014.

Method	Option 1 (Business as Usual)	Option 2 (Special Rate Variation)	Other	Total
Telephone Survey	201	306	-	507
Letter and Email	94	39	25	158
Online Submissions	275	148	44	467
Telephone Submissions	20	12	-	32
Total	590 (51%)	505 (43%)	69 (6%)	1164

It should be noted that the requirements by IPART for Council to apply for a Special Rate Variation, or in this case an Infrastructure Levy, do not require community support for the proposal. Rather, IPART requires that the community is adequately informed about the proposal and are given an opportunity to provide feedback. There are also a number of other factors that IPART considers when determining if a Council is eligible for a Special Rate Variation, which include the ratepayers' ability to pay an increase as well as a sound business case outlining the need for additional funding to address an infrastructure backlog.

The following section of this report outlines consultation activities which have occurred since the Council resolution on 4 August 2014 and in addition to the 18 months of previous community consultation in relation to the proposed Special Rate Variation 2013/2014.

Letter to Rate Payers

On 22 September 2014 a letter from the General Manager detailing background information on the proposed Infrastructure Levy along with a brochure outlining the four scenarios was sent to 22, 800 rate payers. The letter and brochure provided information advising how to make a submission regarding the Infrastructure Levy.

Online Submissions and Database

The Have Your Say Willoughby site provided a page dedicated to the proposed Infrastructure Levy with detailed information and relevant documents available for download. The site provided the opportunity for people to make a submission. Over the course of the consultation period the site had 1,554 unique visitors, of which 1,366 downloaded a document or viewed the brochure, with 228 people making an online submission.

During the consultation process the 1,661 subscribers to Council's Have Your Say Willoughby database were sent an email which included an invitation to provide feedback as well as a summary of the proposed Infrastructure Levy.

Submissions by Email and Mail

Council received 46 submissions by letter and email which are included in the results table in the discussion section of this report.

Public Meetings

Council held two public meetings for the proposed Infrastructure Levy. Details of the meetings were included in the information sent to every ratepayer and were also included in the information brochure which was widely distributed. An article in the North Shore Times also advertised the meeting dates.

The meetings were both held in the Council Chambers and took place on Thursday 9th October and Saturday 11th October. There were a total of 32 members of the public in attendance at both meetings, with 17 attending on Thursday and 15 at the Saturday meeting. In addition to community members there were approximately 10 senior staff and Councillors on hand to answer questions and provide further information.

The main issues which were raised at the public meetings were how the different scenarios would impact on rates, technical issues about each of the four scenarios and general questions about Council's maintenance of assets. The issue of amalgamations, cost savings and efficiency gains were also raised.

Council finance staff including the Financial Services Director attended the Federation of Progress Associations meeting in October. Officers answered questions of the attendees and in general there appeared to be acceptance of the notion of an Infrastructure Levy to address the asset maintenance backlog.

Telephone Feedback

Officers in customer service, corporate support, finance and infrastructure answered phone calls from people wishing to ask a question regarding the proposed Infrastructure Levy. Officers provided information and directed people to make a submission using the formal channels available.

Council Website

The Council website featured a large banner in the most prominent position on the site directing people to visit the Have Your Say Willoughby site to find out information, ask a question or make a submission.

Information Stall at Willoughby Street Fair

An information stall was held at the Willoughby Street Fair. The information stall gave community members the opportunity to ask questions of the Financial Services Director, Financial Services Manager and senior staff in relation to the proposed Infrastructure Levy. The stall also provided an opportunity to hand out information including Infrastructure Levy brochures, asset fact sheets, copies of Council's strategic documents and other related information.

Media

The Media and Marketing team prepared an extensive media and marketing plan to inform the community of Council's intention to apply for the Infrastructure Levy. As well as directly mailing every rate payer and contacting over 1500 members of Council's online database, there were also two public notices in the fortnightly Council page in the North Shore Times and a large banner featured on the Council website. There were also several articles on this subject in the North Shore Times and an article in The Daily Telegraph.

Voluntary Donation Agreement

Part of the Council resolution on 4 August 2014 was that Council officers investigate the possibility of a voluntary donation agreement whereby members of the community are able to make contributions to specific infrastructure projects.

The concept was to enable community members to identify specific asset infrastructure projects they support and make contributions to those projects. The donation system could operate side by side with the Levy. It would not generate sufficient funds to replace a Levy.

The system could operate over the life of the Levy (7 years) or for another period determined by Council. The process would require establishing a procedure for community members to offer the contribution and nominate the project, creation of a deposit mechanism (one off or periodical) to make the contribution, creation of a special reserve and identification of each contribution for each asset, report to Council on contributions received and how the funds would be applied, auditing of the accounts and informing the community about how the contributions were expended.

Officers have investigated this possibility and come to the conclusion that the cost and time involved with implementing, running and reporting on such a program would far outweigh the benefits of any likely donations.

Fit for the Future

The NSW Government has recently announced the Fit for the Future program to reform local government in NSW following the recommendations of the Independent Local Government Review Panel. As part of this initiative Council is required to prepare a submission for review by an Independent Panel by 30 June 2015. The submission needs to address how Council meets the criteria set by the State Government in relation to scale, capacity and efficiency of operations among other criteria.

Council currently exceeds all criteria relating to its finances however does not meet any of the asset related indicators (currently unaudited) as shown in the following table. The application of Infrastructure Levy funds would have an immediate impact on both the Infrastructure Renewal and Backlog Ratios. Councillors should be wary of comparability of unaudited data as much of it and resultant indicators can be heavily influenced by individual council policies and methodologies.

Benchmark	2012	2013	2014	3 Year Average
Operating Performance Ratio >1	-7.94%	0.60%	11.81%	1.49%
Own Source Revenue > 60%	86.57%	83.46%	81.98%	84%
Renewal Ratio > 100%	51%	44%	67%	54%
Infrastructure Backlog < 2%	7.13%	4.63%	6.09%	5.95%
Asset Maintenance Ratio > 100%	62%	80%	62%	68%
Debt Service Ratio >0-<20	7.80%	9.38%	5.60%	7.59%

Conclusion

Over the past two years Council has conducted an extensive community consultation program in relation to community assets, expected levels of service, a Special Rate Variation and now an Infrastructure Levy. This consultation has been in line with IPART's expectation that the community is adequately informed about any proposed increase in rates and has been designed to provide accessible information to a wide reaching audience using a variety of mediums.

During this time officers have investigated and carried out consultation in a number of formats including online surveys, discussion forums and Q & A sessions, a citizens' panel, information stalls, social media activities as well as traditional forms of engagement. With the resources available a significant effort has been made to inform and engage the community to find a solution to address the asset maintenance backlog which has been identified through many years of research by Council officers.

Having conducted the consultation as outlined in this report, as well as preparing the long term financial, asset management and strategic plans which have been adopted by Council, the organisation is now in a position where it is possible to apply to IPART for an Infrastructure Levy. An Infrastructure Levy would address the asset maintenance backlog and bring community assets to the expected level of service as identified and expressed by the community.

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

That

- 1. In December 2014 Council notifies the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) of its intention to apply for an Infrastructure Levy (Special Rate Variation) to commence in 2015/16**
- 2. Council apply to IPART in February 2015 for an Infrastructure Levy (Special Rate Variation) as outlined in Scenario 3. Assuming a rate peg of 2.6% over the 7 year period, the following cumulative increases to apply.**

	Infrastructure Levy %	Rate Peg % (assumed)	SCENARIO 3	Cumulative %
Year 1	4.5	2.6	7.1%	7.1%
Year 2	2.0	2.6	4.6%	12.03%
Year 3	0.0	2.6	2.6%	14.94%
Year 4	0.0	2.6	2.6%	17.93%
Year 5	0.0	2.6	2.6%	20.99%
Year 6	0.0	2.6	2.6%	24.14%
Year 7	0.0	2.6	2.6%	27.37%

SPECIAL RATE VARIATION COMMUNITY CONSULTATION SUMMARY

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: TRACEY CROUCH - CORPORATE SUPPORT AND PERFORMANCE DIRECTOR
TONY PIZZUTO - FINANCIAL SERVICES DIRECTOR

AUTHOR: DARIUS TURNER – CORPORATE PLANNING AND GOVERNANCE CO-ORDINATOR

CITY STRATEGY LINK: 6.3.1 COUNCIL MAINTAINS A STRONG SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL POSITION

MEETING DATE: 24 FEBRUARY 2014

Purpose of Report

To inform Council of the feedback received through the final phase of community consultation regarding the proposed Special Rate Variation for 2014/15.

Background

On 25 November 2013 Council resolved –

That:

- 1. Council notes the timeframes for making an application for a Special Rate Variation to IPART.**
- 2. Council notes a report and updated Delivery Program, Long Term Financial Plan and Asset Management Plan will be submitted to Council on 2 December 2013.**
- 3. Council proceed with Phase 3 of the community consultation program relating to asset levels of service and a possible Special Rate Variation beginning on 25 November 2013.**
- 4. Council officers bring back a report outlining the options available to Council should the community consultation indicate opposition to a rate variation. The report should include, amongst other options, any operational efficiencies, additional revenue opportunities and/or assets that could be disposed of.**
- 5. Council notify IPART of an Intention to submit a Special Rate Variation application for the 2014/2015 Financial year, Council's final decision on the formal submission of an application being dependent on the outcome of the community consultation under Phase 3 above.**

As such officers commenced the final phase of community consultation on a proposed Special Rate Variation application to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) in 2014/15.

On 3 February 2014 Council resolved not to make an application to IPART for a Special Rate Variation in 2014/15. Council officers concluded the formal consultation phase at that time, although as the original closing date for the end of the consultation period was 10 February 2014 some submissions were received after 3 February 2014.

Discussion

This report details the activities of the final phase of consultation for the proposed Special Rate Variation 2014/15. Information on consultation prior to this phase, including a 12 month consultation examining Council's assets and community expected levels of service were presented in previous reports to Council.

A variety of methods were used to receive feedback and inform the community regarding the possibility of Council making an application for a Special Rate Variation in 2014/15. Below is a summary of these methods.

Letter to Rate Payers

On 6 December 2013 a letter from the General Manager detailing background information on the proposed Special Rate Variation along with a brochure outlining the options available to Council was sent to 27, 900 rate payers.

On 21 January 2014 a follow up letter was sent to 27, 900 rate payers asking for further feedback and inviting them to attend a public meeting at the Dougherty Community Centre on 4 February 2014.

Telephone Survey

IRIS Research was commissioned by Council to undertake a telephone survey of its ratepayers regarding the Special Rate Variation. The telephone survey took place in the week commencing 15 December 2013 and achieved a final sample of 507 adult decision makers.

The key finding of the survey was 60.4% of residents surveyed in Willoughby City supported a Special Rate Variation to keep assets and services at acceptable levels in line with expectations of the community.

This left 39.6% of respondents that supported the 'Business as Usual' option with no Special rate Variation and the need to reduce services in the future.

Information Stall at Chatswood Library

There were information stalls held at Chatswood Library on 16 December 2013 and 21 January 2014. The information stalls gave community members the opportunity to ask questions of senior staff in relation to the proposed Special Rate Variation. The stalls also were an opportunity to hand out information including asset fact sheets, SRV brochures, copies of the Delivery Program and Long Term Financial Plan, Citizens' Panel Report and other documents.

There were 52 people who gave feedback or asked questions at the information stalls. People also used the information stalls to make comment or suggestions about other Council services. General feedback was that people appreciated the opportunity to talk face to face with officers about this issue.

Online Submissions and Database

The Have Your Say Willoughby site provided a page dedicated to the proposed Special Rate Variation with detailed information and relevant documents available for download. The site provided the opportunity for people to make a submission or ask a question. Over the course of the consultation period the site had 3,400 visits from 2,365 unique visitors.

Council received 467 submissions through the Have Your Say Willoughby site. Of these submissions 275 were in support of Option 1 ('Business as Usual'), 148 were in support of Option 2 (Special Rate Variation) with the rest of submissions not giving a clear indication of which option they supported.

During the consultation process Council's online database of 1,274 subscribers were sent emails which included an invitation to provide feedback or ask a question on the proposed Special Rate Variation.

Online Question and Answer Forum

There were 66 questions received through this consultation method. The questions varied in the detail of information requested and covered a broad range of subjects, not all relating directly to the application for a Special Rate Variation.

The amount of time devoted by officers in responding to these questions was not insignificant and demonstrates Council's willingness to provide accurate, detailed and transparent information to the community. In some cases the questions were based on information which was not correct, and by providing factual information using this method of consultation officers were able to inform community members in detail about what a possible Special Rate Variation would mean for them.

Submissions by Email and Mail

Council received 158 submissions by letter and email. Of these submissions 94 were in support of Option 1 ('Business as Usual'), 39 were in support of Option 2 (Special Rate Variation) with the rest of submissions not giving a clear indication of which option they supported. A small number of these submissions were forwarded to Council from the Local State Member.

Telephone Feedback

Officers in customer service, corporate support, finance and infrastructure answered phone calls from people wishing to make a submission or ask a question. The number of telephone calls received from people wishing to make a submission was 32, with 20 in support of Option 1 ('Business as Usual') and 12 in support of Option 2 (Special Rate Variation).

Council Website

The Council website featured a large banner in the most prominent position on the site directing people to visit the Have Your Say Willoughby site to find out information, ask a question or make a submission.

Media

The Media and Marketing team prepared an extensive media and marketing plan to inform the community of Council's intention to apply for the Special Rate Variation. This included two media releases, four public notices in the fortnightly Council page in the North Shore Times. Information on Council's website, posts on social media including facebook and twitter and a letter to the editor of the North Shore Times from The Mayor. There were also nine articles on this subject in the North Shore Times as well as editorial and public comments.

The above is the communication phase of the SRV application only. The Media and Marketing team have, over the previous 12 months implemented further communications informing the community on asset management – including factsheets, a video, media communications and social media.

Public Meeting

There were 180 people who had notified Council that they would be attending the public meeting on 4 February at the Dougherty Community Centre. As Council resolved on 3 February to cancel the public meeting officers attempted to contact all who had indicated they would be attending the meeting by phone and email. Approximately 50 people still attended the Dougherty Centre at the time of the meeting, most of whom who had not indicated they would be attending, and officers were on site to inform them the meeting was cancelled and to answer any further questions they had.

Western Research Institute Report

The Western Research Institute (WRI) was engaged by Council to assess the impact of the implementation of the proposed rates increases. The following were the main conclusions of the study.

Under Option 1 the proposed rates increase:

- will be below neighbouring LGAs—Lane Cove, North Sydney, Ku-ring-gai, Warringah and Mosman—by a substantial margin and below residential rates in Group 3 LGAs (Council areas in Sydney comparable to Willoughby)
- will be below anticipated household price increases covering utilities and many other cost categories
- is not expected to impose a significant burden on households, as they will change household expenditure by less than one percentage point
- business rates will be below business rates in neighbouring LGAs and above business rates in Group 3 LGAs, and
- for businesses the proposed rates increases indicate an insignificant impact on business viability.

Under Option 2 the proposed rates increase:

- will be below residential rates in neighbouring LGAs by a substantial margin and below residential rates in Group 3 LGAs
- will be below anticipated household price increases on utilities and child care but will be above price increases in all other cost categories
- is not expected to impose a significant burden on households, as they will change household expenditure on rates by less than one percentage point
- business rates will be below business rates in neighbouring LGAs and above business rates in Group 3 LGAs, and
- for businesses the proposed rates increases indicate an insignificant impact on business viability.

Summary of feedback received in final phase of the consultation

Method	Option 1 (Business as Usual)	Option 2 (Special Rate Variation)	Other	Total
Telephone Survey	201	306	-	507
Letter and Email	94	39	25	158
Online Submissions	275	148	44	467
Telephone Submissions	20	12	-	32
Total	590 (51%)	505 (43%)	69 (6%)	1164

Conclusion

The community consultation on the proposed Special Rate Variation was extensive and used a variety of methods to both inform the community about the proposal and provide opportunities for Council to receive feedback. The feedback received indicates that the two options provided both received a certain level of support from the community.

The feedback received by Council during this consultation on the proposed Special Rate Variation for 2014/15 may still be relevant and useful if Council decides to consult again on the asset maintenance funding backlog or another Special Rate Variation Application in the near future.

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

That the information be noted.

Summary - Have Your Say Willoughby

Period: 16 Aug 2014, 12:00 AM - 22 Oct 2014, 11:59 PM

Projects: Infrastructure Levy

People who are

Community Users	Aware	Informed	Engaged
1670	1554 100%	1366 88%	275 18%
	Unique Visits (Median)	Actions (median)	Contributions (median)
	1.0	6.0	1.0