



Success. Mapped.

# Future Cardinia Community Panel

Panel outcomes report



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# Introduction and project background

## Introduction

Councils across Victoria are required under the Local Government Act 2020 to undertake a deliberative engagement process to inform its Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan and Asset Plan. For Cardinia Shire Council (Council) this process involved creating a community panel, a group of community members representing a diverse cross section of the Cardinia Shire community.

Council engaged a deliberative panel – the Future Cardinia Community Panel – to review and update the Community Vision 2040 and provide input into the development of guidance that will inform the Council Plan 2025–29, and the Liveability Plan, Asset Plan and long-term Financial Plan.

## Project background

Council's overarching community engagement program is called 'Future Cardinia'. The program includes three rounds of community engagement, which were developed to align with Council's [Community Engagement Policy 2021-2025](#).

Council has partnered with Insync to design and deliver the deliberative process, and to support with Stage One and Stage Two community engagement (see Figure 1). Insync is also delivering the internal engagement to develop the Council Plan.

In Stage One, a representative sample of the Cardinia community was selected to form the Future Cardinia People's Panel (the panel). The panel served to represent Cardinia's broader community values and aspirations, whilst deliberating over the challenges Council is facing. The panel collectively reviewed the Community Vision, identified community priorities for the next four years, and provided guidance to Council on managing finances and investing in assets.

The four panel sessions were held in February 2025 and were designed and facilitated by Insync.

## Report purpose

This report provides a summary of the panel process and outcomes of the Stage One engagement, as well as an evaluation of panel member feedback. The report has been prepared by Insync.

Throughout the process, additional data and feedback were collected – this has all been provided to Council for their review and consideration.

Council will use the feedback in this report to develop the Council Plan, Asset Plan and Financial Plan. These documents will be shared with the community for their feedback in two further stages of engagement.



Figure 1: Community engagement stages

# Limitations

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## Engagement limitations

There are limitations regarding the engagement methodology and outcomes that should be considered when reading this report. These limitations are outlined below.

- The Community Panel Expression of Interest (EOI) occurred in December 2024 and January 2025. This is a challenging time to promote a project as it includes the school holidays and Christmas period. The project team sought to mitigate this by widely promoting the project – details of this are on the next page.
- The panel was selected to match the demographic profile of the community in Cardinia Shire. However, the final membership is not necessarily a statistically accurate match – this is mainly due to people not responding to invitations to attend, dropping out part-way, or lower EOIs for some demographic categories.
- Not all demographic criteria can be met in a panel selection process. A select set of demographics aligned to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, was developed by Insync and confirmed by Council in advance of the EOI process commencing.
- While the panel provided a cross-section of views, it cannot be guaranteed that the community's complete set of views were represented through this engagement. Throughout the process, the panel was reminded that they were there to represent the wider community and asked to consider what was best for the whole of the Cardinia community.
- The EOI forms sought demographic information from respondents. The information provided in respondent EOI forms was accepted to be provided in good faith, and truthful.
- Panel session discussions and outputs were largely participant-led. Some participants may have chosen to contribute more robustly in some activities and not others.
- Panel attendance at each session varied, as such, a varied number of recorded responses are recorded by activity.
- A total of 55 EOI applicants were sent an invitation to join the panel. Following a low acceptance to the initial invitation, a secondary invitation was made by phone to an additional 18 EOI applicants. Over-recruitment is common practice and allows for natural drop-off.
- Three panel members dropped out of the process after the process had commenced. The panel demographics included in this report reference all the panel members who accepted to be a part of the process.
- It is normal for participants to drop out of a process like this. Reasons for dropping out can be diverse, such as health changes, the process was not what they expected or conflicting commitments. Drop-outs affect the diversity of representation in the panel.
- Where there is a difference in number of participants responding to a question, the number of respondents is noted as (n=). A difference in a number of respondents must be considered when reviewing results as averages can be more impacted by a smaller respondent pool.

# Future Cardinia Community Panel

The following pages outline how the opportunity to join the Future Cardinia Community Panel was shared with the community, how the panel was selected and the demographics of the panel.

### Panel promotion

A public Expression of Interest (EOI) was undertaken to attract the interest of the Cardinia community. The EOI was open from 17 December 2024 to 22 January 2025. Below is how the EOI process was promoted.

Table 1: EOI promotion methods

| Promotion methods                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A Creating Cardinia webpage hosted the EOI form and all project information                                                                                                                                      |
| A digital banner promoting the project featured on the main Council webpage                                                                                                                                      |
| Two paid ½ page ads in local print media and two media releases in December 2024 and January 2025                                                                                                                |
| 80 posters displayed and leaflets delivered to Cardinia Life leisure centre, local IGAs, rural/urban post offices, shops, youth centre school holiday program, community centers, libraries, and council offices |
| Corflute signage at skateparks, parks, swimming pools, community gardens, and Council engagement pop ups at events                                                                                               |
| One post on Youth Services Instagram and two paid posts on Facebook with a reach of 11,501.                                                                                                                      |
| Community and Cardinia business e-news electronic newsletters included promotion of the project                                                                                                                  |
| 5000 letter drops and emails to randomised residents addresses across the Cardinia Shire                                                                                                                         |
| Council staff attended advisory groups and committee meetings to provide information about the EOI opportunity                                                                                                   |
| 10 internal emails were sent to inform staff to share the opportunity and encourage EOIs                                                                                                                         |

### Selection process

Panel members were selected to closely represent the diverse community of Cardinia. A select set of demographics aligned to ABS data was developed by Insync and confirmed by Council. The selection process was completed by Insync and was independent of Council.

The EOI form was designed to collect the following information:

- Township (locality)
- Gender
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Disability and carer
- Household type and tenure
- Member of the LGBTIQ+ community
- Language spoken at home
- Relationship to Cardinia (live in; work in; study in; own a business in Cardinia)
- Participation with Council in the past 12 months
- Potential conflicts of interest (e.g., work for Council or an elected representative).

EOI respondents were asked whether there was anything they need to support them to participate in the panel (e.g., an interpreter, hearing or sight accommodation, etc.).

A total of 375 EOIs were received. From the EOIs, 55 were randomly selected to match the target demographics as detailed on pages 6-8.



Target panel size

The target panel size was 45 participants. A panel of 45 participants has become a trusted number for deliberations as the group size is large enough to allow for a good diversity of views to be represented, and to encourage healthy debate. The aim is to reach a ‘descriptive match’ of the population, where community members can identify their likeness represented in the panel.

The panel selection was made to match, as closely as possible, the agreed criteria. The criteria, where possible, were informed by 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data. A total of 46 people accepted a position as a panel member.

Panel demographics

The following section provides an overview of the demographic mix of the panel demographics, as compared to targeted panel demographics.

Gender

There were slightly more females than males represented on the panel. People who are transgender or gender diverse were not represented on the panel.

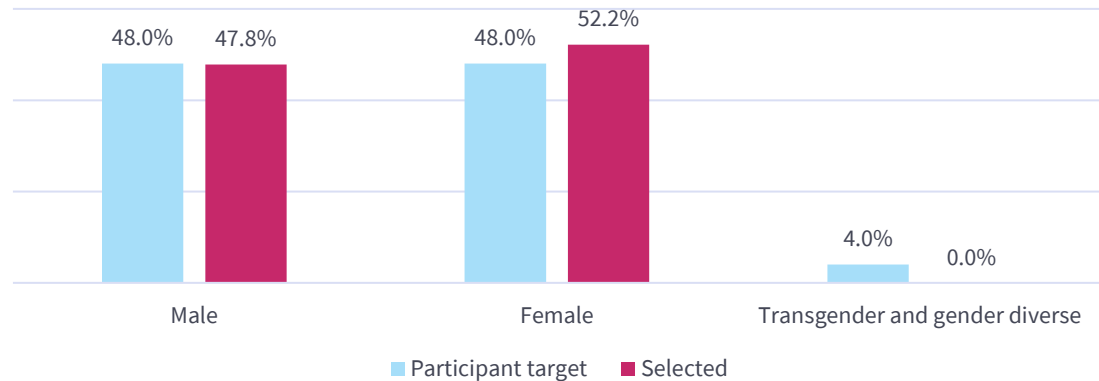


Figure 2: Panel member gender

Age

People of a wide age range were represented on the panel, with the exception of people aged over 85. People aged 15-24 were also underrepresented whilst people aged 25-34 were overrepresented.

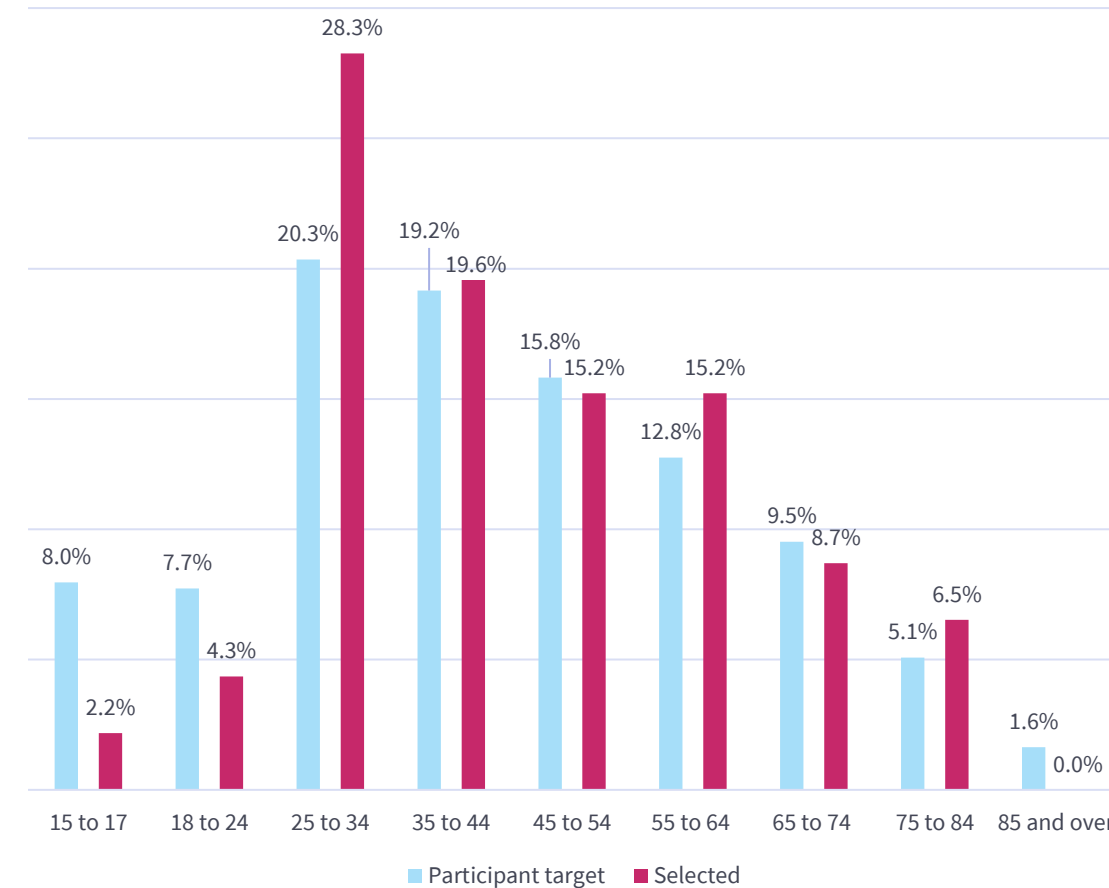


Figure 3: Panel member age



Relationship to Cardinia

All panel participants lived in Cardinia. People who studied in and worked in Cardinia were slightly overrepresented, whilst business owners were slightly underrepresented.

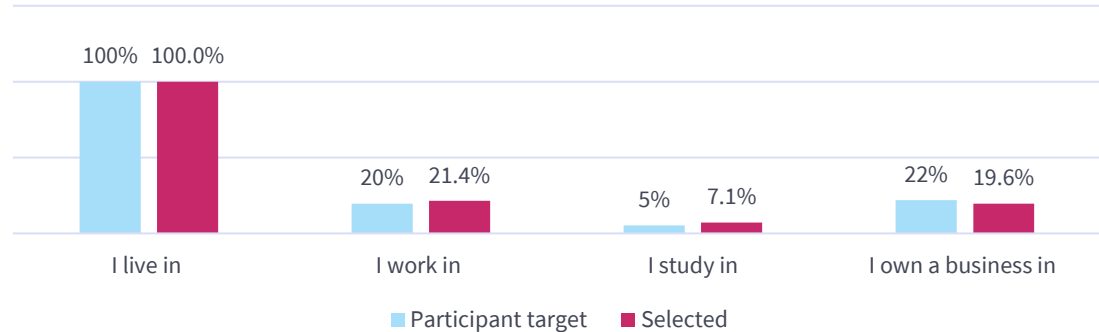


Figure 4: Panel relationship to Cardinia

Household make-up

All household types were well represented on the panel. Couples with children were and group households were overrepresented, whilst lone person households and one parent families were underrepresented.

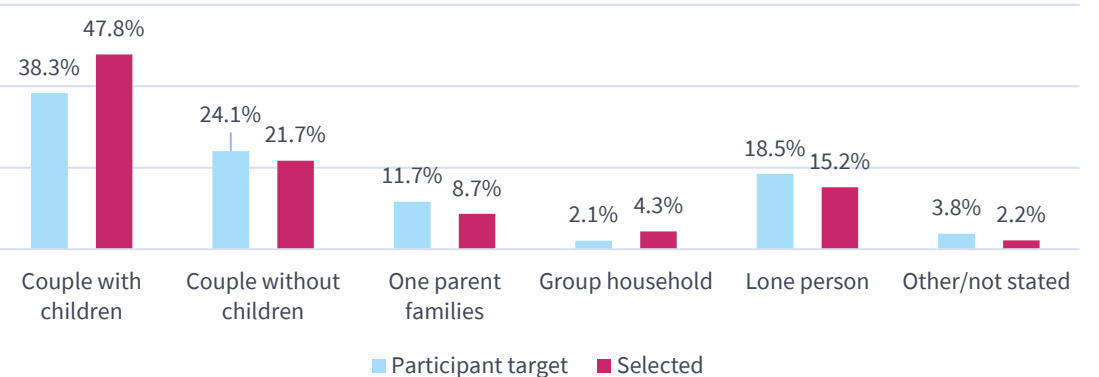


Figure 5: Panel household make-up

Diversity and representation

People with a disability, carers of people with a disability, members of the LGBTIQ+ community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and people that speak a language other than English were identified as typically lesser heard from groups. The most common languages other than English spoken were Punjabi and Sinhalese. Figure 6 shows the numbers of participants from these groups against the targets.

All groups were represented on the panel with all groups being slightly overrepresented. A maximum target was set for participants who had engaged with Council in the last 12 months – only two panel members had recent engagement with Council.

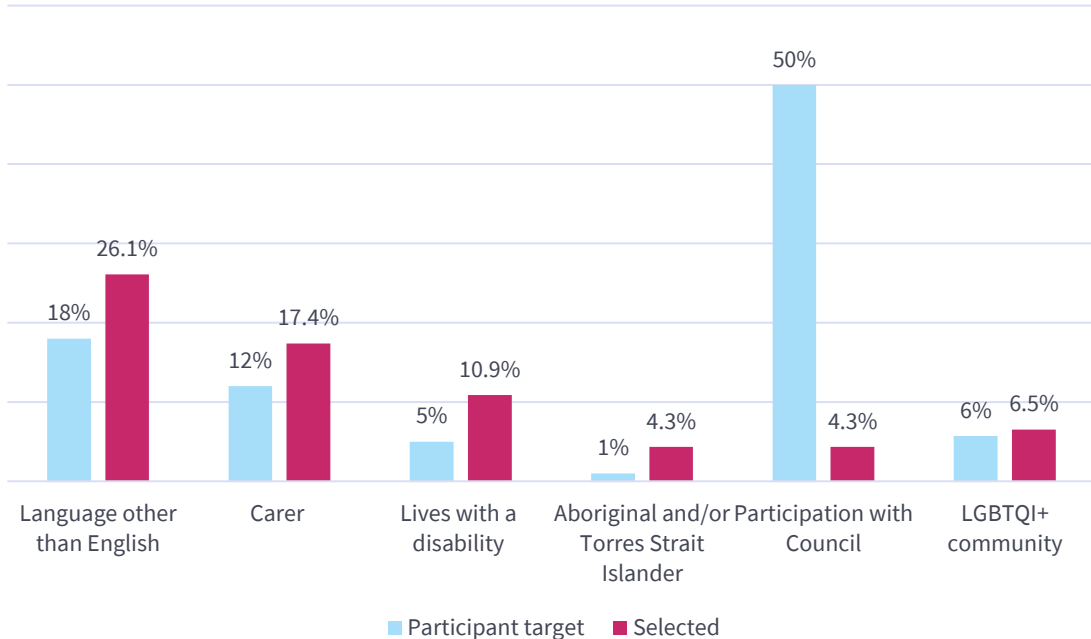


Figure 6: Panel diversity and representation



Household tenure

While people renting privately and people who fully owned their homes were slightly overrepresented, mortgage holders were slightly underrepresented. People who rent in social housing were not represented.

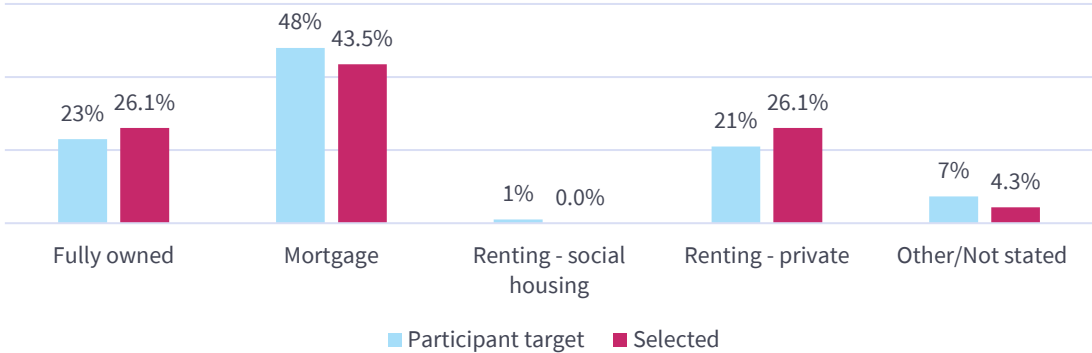


Figure 7: Panel member household tenure

Locality

Panel members came from a wide range of localities across Cardinia. There was a notable lack in representation from Gembrook, Bayles, Catini and surrounds. Officer and Officer South were slightly overrepresented, whilst Pakenham was slightly underrepresented.

Localities were grouped using ABS data. Those localities with lower populations have been grouped with neighbouring areas. For areas with higher population densities, targets have been rounded down to ensure that a diversity of views are represented.

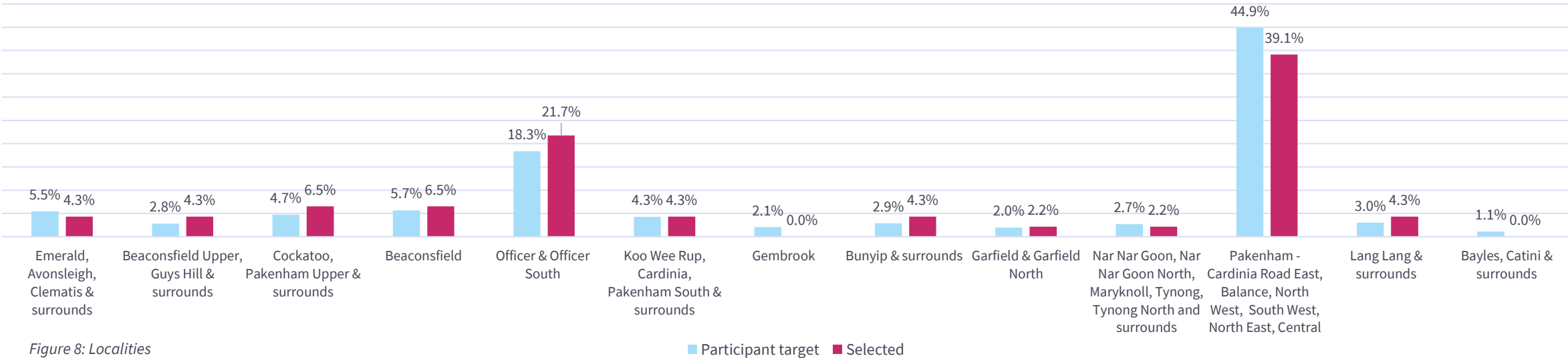


Figure 8: Localities



# Panel session overview

## Problem statement and outputs

The panel were asked to consider the following problem statement:

Council is committed to meeting the needs of our diverse and growing community. We're facing financial pressures that require careful investment choices. How should Council deliver for the community while continuing to manage our finances responsibly?

In considering the problem statement, the panel were asked to develop specific outputs – these, along with Council’s promise, how the panel’s outputs would be used are presented below. Council’s promise to the panel was aligned with the IAP2 Spectrum for Public Participation.

Table 2: Panel outputs and Council’s promise

| Panel output                                                                                                                               | Council’s promise                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A confirmed Community Vision that continues to articulate the long-term aspirations of the community to 2040, and adopt changes, if needed | Empower: Council’s promise is that any changes to the Community Vision will be adopted and will not be changed by Council                 |
| Guidance on what Council should focus on over the next four years to achieve the vision                                                    | Involve: Council's promise is that the guidance will be strongly considered and reflected where possible in the final strategic documents |
| Responses to three questions to provide guidance to Council on how to continue to manage Council’s finances responsibly                    |                                                                                                                                           |
| Responses to three questions to provide guidance to Council on it makes investments in assets                                              |                                                                                                                                           |

## Panel material and information

### Welcome Pack

Panel members were provided with a Welcome Pack before the first session. The pack helped participants to build an understanding of the panel and process. The pack included information about the panel, what to expect as a panel member and what they would work on.

It also included links to relevant plans and strategic documents, a link to a participant portal, and an overview of the sessions. It outlined information about the role of local government and legislated requirements for engagement.

### Creating Cardinia panel member page

A private online group on Creating Cardinia had supporting information, background materials and presentations from the panel sessions. It also had a space for Panel members to post questions and interact outside of the sessions.

### Presentations

Council officers attended each session to support the panel and to provide information and answer questions. Expert speakers from Council presented information on Council and the Cardinia municipality and the community.

Presentations included the role of local government, challenges and opportunities facing Cardinia, details on Cardinia’s population, economy and industry, Cardinia’s health and wellbeing and an overview of the Council Plan, Asset Plan and Financial Plan.



The panel process was delivered over four sessions, which took place in-person and online. In-person sessions were held at Council's office in Officer. Outlined below are the details of each panel session including the date, format, agenda and attendance.

Table 3: Session details

|   | Date / time                            | Format          | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Attendance |
|---|----------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Thursday 6 February<br>6.00pm – 8.30pm | Online via Zoom | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mayor's welcome, agenda and housekeeping</li> <li>Presentations: Panel role, promise and task; Community Vision and Council Plan</li> <li>Activity: Introductions and reflections on the Vision</li> <li>Presentations: Council 101; Cardinia challenges and opportunities</li> <li>Break</li> <li>Activity #2: Creating group working agreements</li> <li>Activity #3: Financial Plan poll</li> <li>Wrap up and next steps</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              | 37         |
| 2 | Saturday 8 February<br>9.30am – 4.00pm | In-person       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome, agenda, housekeeping</li> <li>Presentation: Panel agreed ways of working</li> <li>Presentations: Community data; Wellbeing and liveability; Managing land use and development; Cardinia's community priorities</li> <li>Morning tea break</li> <li>Activities: Confirm what, if anything, needs to change in the Vision</li> <li>Lunch</li> <li>Activity: Financial Plan poll</li> <li>Discussion: Making decisions and advice</li> <li>Activities: Update Vision and identify focus areas for the next 4-years</li> <li>Wrap up and next steps</li> </ul> | 29         |

|   | Date / time                             | Format          | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Attendance |
|---|-----------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 3 | Thursday 13 February<br>6.00pm – 9.00pm | Online via Zoom | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome, session purpose and housekeeping</li> <li>Presentations: Update on Confirmed Community Vision and update; Council's finances and challenges</li> <li>Facilitated Q&amp;A</li> <li>Activity: Guidance on continuing to manage Council's finances responsibly</li> <li>Break</li> <li>Activity: Council's focus to achieve the Vision</li> <li>Wrap up and next steps</li> </ul>                                            | 29         |
| 4 | Thursday 27 February<br>6.00pm – 9.00pm | In-person       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome, session purpose and housekeeping</li> <li>Presentation: Confirmed Community Vision</li> <li>Presentation: Council's approach to asset management and planning</li> <li>Facilitated Q&amp;A</li> <li>Activity: Guidance on how Council makes investments in assets</li> <li>Break</li> <li>Activity: Council's focus to achieve the Vision</li> <li>Hand panel outputs to Mayor</li> <li>Wrap up and next steps</li> </ul> | 31         |

# Panel outputs

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Over four panel sessions, the panel developed four primary outputs, including a reviewed Community Vision, community priorities for the next four years to inform the Council Plan and guidance for Council as it develops the Asset Plan and Financial Plan. The following section details the panel outputs.

## Community Vision

The Community Vision was developed as a 20-year vision by the Creating Cardinia Community Panel in 2021. As such, the request of the panel was to review the Community Vision and to ensure the vision continues to articulate long-term aspirations of the community to 2040.

The panel undertook the following process of review.

- At session #1, the panel, working in small groups, reflected on the Vision and discussed whether it continues to articulate long-term aspirations of the community to 2040.
- At session #2, the panel was divided into eight groups and asked to discuss “What, if anything, needs to change for the vision to articulate long-term aspirations of the community to 2040?” The groups had to agree on five suggested changes to the Vision.
- These eight groups merged to make four groups. They were invited to share their suggested changes, merging the similarities and discussing differences. Each group reduced their suggested changes to the Vision down to five changes.
- The suggested changes from each group were displayed on the wall, and the panel was asked to vote individually, using dots, on the two suggested changes they would most like to see in the Vision.

- A subgroup of five panel members was formed to review the suggested changes and update the Vision. Before they left the main group to undertake this activity, the panel provided them with advice and what to do if there were suggested changes that conflict.
- The sub-group updated the Vision and then presented the reviewed Vision to the panel.
  - The panel was asked “Do you support this as your confirmed Community Vision statement for Cardinia?”. Their options were: Yes, I support it, I have mixed feelings, but I can live with it and No, I cannot live with it. The aim of the activity was to reach panel consensus or no less than 80% of the panel can support the vision or live with the vision.
  - Through a facilitated process, the sub-group listened to the feedback from members of the panel who said they cannot live with the Vision and made changes.
  - The subgroup shared the updated Vision, and the panel was asked again “Do you support this as your confirmed Community Vision statement for Cardinia?”. At this vote, there were no panel members who could not live with the Vision; there were five panel members who had mixed feelings, but I could live with it. These Panel members shared their concerns, and the subgroup noted feedback and committed to making changes and presenting the final Vision at session #4.
- At session #4, the confirmed Community Vision, (see page 12) was presented to the Mayor.

Please note that since the writing of the Vision in 2021, there were changes to the Recognised Aboriginal Parties in the Cardinia area. Cardinia Shire Council made the panel aware of the change and this has been reflected in the Vision.

### Cardinia Community Vision

*We acknowledge that we are on the traditional land of the Bunurong and Wurundjeri people. We understand, value and incorporate these contributions, past and present.*

*We empower everyone to have a voice. We speak with the optimism and insight of our people, the energy of our community members and the wisdom of all those that came before us.*

*We support all people of Cardinia so that they are strong, resilient, safe, socially connected and physically and mentally well. We do this by strengthening community cohesion through engagement and advocacy.*

*We care for our country. We take preventative and mitigative actions on climate change in our community, environment, and the planet in everything we do.*

*We are sustainable in the way we live, we work close to home, we grow food and we make valuable contributions to the nation.*

*We protect our community, farms, industries, landscapes and biodiversity to ensure they are resilient.*

*We provide fit for purpose infrastructure and services that cater for the growth of the community. Growth will be managed prudently and sustainably so that it enables our progress towards community priorities.*

*Through advocacy and community engagement, the infrastructure, local community and healthcare services are in place to meet our needs.*



Community priorities

To provide guidance in the development of the Council Plan, over three sessions (sessions #2 to #4) the panel considered and responded to the question, “What should Council focus on over the next four years to achieve the vision?”. They were also asked to consider “How will Council will know if they are doing well?”.

The panel took the following process to complete this task:

- At session #2, the group in six small groups brainstorm responses to the questions and record ideas on paper. Note during this activity, the subgroup was concurrently updating the Vision.
- At the next session, Insync provided a summary of the brainstorm (along with the original butcher’s paper) and divided the group into six smaller groups. Each group was asked to review the brainstorm and together agree on five priorities for Council to focus on over the next four years to achieve the Vision, and outline how Council will know it’s doing well.
- At session #4, Insync presented a collated list of priorities grouped under seven key themes. This was presented and tested with the panel to confirm they supported the four-year focus list as an accurate representation of their priorities. The panel was asked to individually review the list of priorities for gaps and add anything missing. This long list of priorities for Council to focus on is presented in Table 4 on the following pages.
- For the final task, the panel were given three dots and asked to vote on the priority themes to indicate what they saw as the main priorities that Council focus on over the next four years to achieve the vision. The result of this activity is presented in Figure 9.

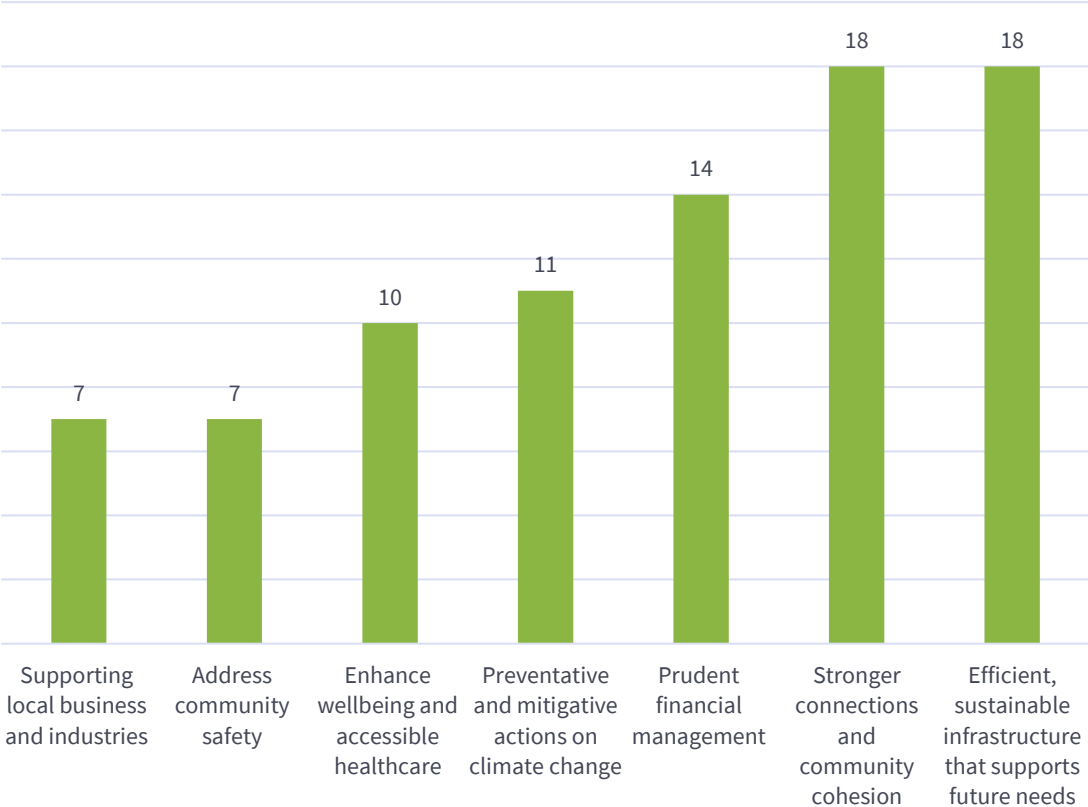


Figure 9: Panel preference of priority themes



Outlined below are the collated list of priorities grouped under the seven key themes. At session #4 the panel was asked to individually review the priorities for gaps and add anything missing. The long list of priorities for Council to focus on are presented below. Note, the gaps are presented as they were written by the panel and may not be in scope to the theme.

Table 4: Council focus areas to achieve the Vision

Efficient, sustainable infrastructure that supports future needs

- Advocate for road planning to be for effective, efficient that reduces road traffic as much as possible
- Sustainable infrastructure; use local contractors and contractors who focus on quality to prevent re-work
- Advocacy on increased bus routes
- More usable green spaces and parks, more indoor public pools
- Infrastructure utilisation strategy - promote what is available and multi-purpose use
- New opportunities with 'green' environmental buildings
- Appropriate development
- Critically evaluated, data driven with future forecast to address evolving needs and demands
- Fit for purpose infrastructure and community assets

Gaps identified at session #4

- Use local contractors so they can be in competition with each other leading to good quality work and more cost effective
- Bus routes with lighting and weather protection
- Community assets that are multi disciplined
- Advocacy by council to other legislated bodies e.g. Vic roads that run through council territory
- Standards for developers to mitigate climate change
- Lifecycle costing should consider environmental costs too incl. toxicity, health impacts, material costs (disposal)
- Promote with welcome packs
- Environmental buildings should have vertical gardens or roof gardens
- Work with the federal government to reduce the amount of unsealed roads
- Engage local aboriginal businesses and community to support environmental and climate adaptation initiatives assess the need based on community feedback/requests

Stronger connections and community cohesion

- Foster stronger connections
  - Community engagement to foster stronger connections, belonging, resilient, strong, safer, etc.
  - Recognising the multicultural nature of the community
  - Build pride in community
  - Energy resilience (supporting each other after an event)
- Communication and events
  - Promoting tourism
  - Identifying areas of what's available for people to do within the shire in terms of tourism/ leisurely time (e.g., advertise, create a webpage – collate services and share them on one URL)
  - Consistently supplying 'connect newsletter' so everyone receives information on what's happening locally
  - Advertising library events in such newsletters and online platform
  - Community engagement by communication portal i.e. improved website)
  - Events: mail, outdoor exercise group, farmers market, multi cultural events, food festivals, community gardens
- Welcoming new residents
  - Welcoming new residents to build new communities e.g., Welcome pack
  - Building community - micro-communities and neighbourhoods; leverage strength in existing towns
  - Attraction and connection strategy

Gaps identified at session #4

- Established town centres in Pakenham and Officer
- Have six-monthly meetings of village committees consultative committee voluntary
- Newsletters should be online and available in hard copy
- Promote community engagement and website
- Easier to locate and take part in shared interest groups existing or creating new (e.g. Gardening, book clubs, art etc.)
- Move from retrospective analysis to a prospective approach
- Use this community panel as a monitoring and evaluation group to meet every six months and review council's progress/outcomes
- Consider friends of our volunteer liaison people to welcome new people and link to services and community
- Stronger organisational collaboration to meet community needs

### Prudent financial management

- Seek creative income streams/ alternatives
- Consider long term investment schemes and partnerships
- Seek professional consultant services and get advised on the best course of actions for increased income

#### Gaps identified at session #4

- Invest in rental dash industrial residential
- Add to budget a financial plan
- Introduce monitoring and evaluation strategy across council
- Repurpose facilities which are underutilised, hire out for functions
- Make developers pay a fair share (more ) – no PSP's should not be fully funded

### Enhance wellbeing and accessible healthcare

- Increase indoor pools, swimming lessons for adults and children, water safety and aquatic therapy
- A primary care facility, not necessarily a hospital but for emergency use
- Increased access to healthcare

#### Gaps identified at session #4

- Pets care
- Holistic wellbeing
- Holistic and integrative healthcare
- Advocacy to commonwealth
- Learning from Aboriginal health
- Strong links to local hospitals

### Preventative and mitigative actions on climate change

- Energy resilience / Clean energy, solar or wind / Solar street lights and community buildings
- Create green spaces / green up Cardinia
- Preventative bushfire for Council spaces
- Council goats to eat grass
- Research initiatives with universities to innovate (multi-year health study based on environmental health)
- Sustainable/safe buildings
- Using green energy providers
- Minimising waste to landfill / effective waste management
- Energy resilience (ensuring a business has a reliable, regular supply of energy and contingency measures in place in the event of a power failure)
- Reduce Co2 footprint e.g., reducing emissions of the community and carbon footprint of Council
- Education
  - How to grow plants and trees (gardening) in the current climate (fire resistant trees and how to maintain plants)
  - On being environmentally sustainable
- Carbon footprint reduction initiative
  - Link the hills and agriculture communities with the population growth
  - Use population growth (housing estates) to innovate with environmental standards
  - Solar lighting
  - Create green spaces in which companies and universities research and innovate within

#### Gaps identified at session #4

- Energy resilience - include power outage prevention and mitigation
- Make government targets for carbon footprint reduction initiative
- Reduce heat island effect in housing estates with tree planting
- Water capture and use for council assets
- Local indigenous plants
- Fire retardant plants minimise grass
- Engage local Aboriginal business to inform and implement environmental and climate mitigation activities
- All new houses to have garden bed for basic veg starter kit (less concrete)

### Address community safety

- Focus on safety in all aspects / address the rapidly increasing crime rate

### Gaps identified at session #4

- CCTV for community spaces offer financial aid to families who otherwise could not afford it vouchers for kids to play sport
- Climate change safety example fire flood heat
- Spread community use buildings across whole shire to minimise traffic and person congestion
- Safety concerns in Main Street
- Change address to solve or reduce

### Supporting local business and industries

- Agriculture - innovation and support for local farming
- Support tourism
- Support diversity of produce (multicultural)
- Invest in local food production (potential shire owned farm for training and employment)
- Support for transition to regenerative farming (supports climate mitigation)

### Gaps identified at session #4

- Publicity campaign for tourism
- Encourage tourism
- Enticing innovation example universities tapes research facilities attract more businesses
- Create a local business council to advise Cardinia council shire could run a farmers market local food networks to help distribute direct from farmers when logistics fail or crisis hits
- Establish Aboriginal business network and promote



**Guidance on managing Councils finance’s responsibly**

Panel members were asked the following question five times: “If you had to choose between Council increasing rates above the legislated rate cap to maintain services or cuts in Council services to save money, what would you choose?”.

Asking the same questions multiple times tested if there was a shift in preference over time, as panel members became more informed on the financial challenges Council is facing. This question is also included in Council’s Satisfaction Survey.

In session #3, the panel was provided with information about how Council manages its finances and were asked to discuss two additional questions: “Should Council ask the users of Council facilities to pay more to cover the cost of those facilities?”, and “Should Council pursue revenue through commercial choices and investments?”.

Rate rises or cuts in service

The panel’s response to choose between Council increasing rates above the legislated rate cap to maintain services or cuts in Council services to save money are presented in Figure 10. Note, there was a change in participants numbers each time this question was asked the number of respondents vary. It is not possible to determine whether certain panel member changed their views or if there were different people and different views presented.

Over the five times this question was asked ‘Don’t know/can’t say’ was the most frequent response (average 31%) this was followed by ‘Probably prefer service cuts’ (30%), and ‘Probably prefer rate rises’ (28%). The ‘Definitely prefer’ categories were least frequently chosen.

Overall preference for service cuts or rate rises was close, with rate rises preferred by 34% of the Panel and service cuts were preferred by 35%

At session #2 and #3, the panel was invited to comment on why they chose their response, comments are grouped under each option and are summarised on the following page.

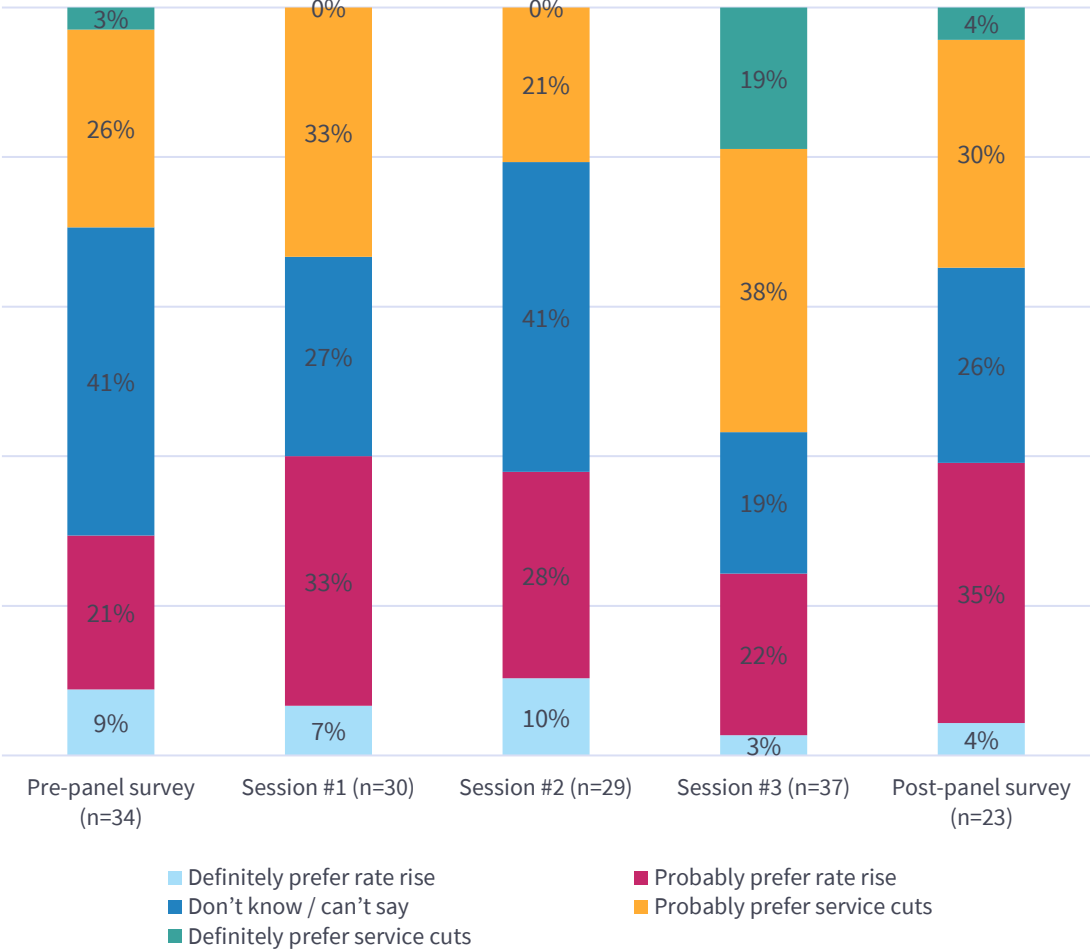


Figure 10: Panel preference of rate rises or service cuts



### Definitely prefer rate rise

Panel members who chose this option generally highlighted that a small increase would be acceptable to most people. They also acknowledged that Council does not have enough money, and that a rate rise would prevent Council from having to cut service cuts.

### Probably prefer rate rise

Panel members who chose this option questioned how much the rate rise would be. They also noted that they would made this choice because they were uncertain or concerned about what service cuts would be made, and the impact of these cuts if they made that choice.

Some of the panel suggested that they would agree to this option if all other options for service cuts or other savings had been considered. They also suggested that the impact of reduced services may already be visible and were concerned about the impact of further reductions, and that a plan is needed to balance service delivery and community needs.

### Don't know / can't say

Panel members who chose this option said they needed more information before they decide, such as what services would be cut or how much rates would rise – noting that some people thought rates were already high. They also questioned if there were other options that could be considered rather than rate rises of service cuts.

### Probably prefer service cuts

Panel members who preferred service cuts suggested that underutilised services (or portions of) could be cut, but noted the approach to cuts should be mindful of affecting those who need the services the most.

Many wanted to ensure costs were streamlined before cutting services and suggested outsourcing services to other organisations, user pay options, management plans for community infrastructure, and looking at other councils to see if Cardinia was comparable in delivering services.

### Definitely prefer service cuts

Panel members who definitely preferred service cuts still wanted to ensure that all efficiencies were made before cutting services and suggested the alternative sources of revenue, as an alternative.

It was noted that certain services like sport clubs may have budgets to be more self sufficient.

The overall results of this question and commentary show an ongoing level of uncertainty amongst the panel on the choices presented, with most participants staying in the 'Don't know / can't say' option and wanting to understand more before committing further.

When discussing this question, the panel often noted concern for other people who might be impacted by their choices. They encouraged all costs to be closely considered and managed, and suggested other sources of revenue as alternatives to the choice of rate cuts or service cuts.



Should user fees be higher to cover facility costs

In session #3, the panel was asked to discuss the following question in small groups: “Should Council ask the users of Council facilities to pay more to cover the cost of those facilities?”. The responses to this question are summarised below.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Opposition for increased fees                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <p>Many of the panel noted opposition to increased fees for users, citing that Council already asks users to pay more and increasing costs may discourage usage and impact the sense of community or have impact on vulnerable groups.</p> <p>It was suggested that parks and public spaces should be managed within the existing budget, and that some facilities and community services, such and neighbourhood houses, should have access to funding from other levels of government, not just Council.</p> <p>Concerns about inconsistencies in charges for different facilities, suggesting that some may not be providing value for money.</p>                                                                                  |
| Support and alternative approaches to user pays                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>Of the few panel members who supported user-pay increases suggested tiered pricing and concessions to ensure affordability, offering premium services at an additional cost for those willing to pay, and broadening the types of user-paid services to generate revenue.</p> <p>Many panel members suggested alternative approaches to user pay increases, including establishing voluntary committees to run facilities, with some suggesting privatisation to help offset costs. They suggested improving online booking systems to reduce Council’s administrative burden</p> <p>They also suggested increased promotion to attract more managed and collecting data on facility use to allocate funding more effectively.</p> |
| Additional considerations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <p>More clarity was sought on which facilities and costs are being discussed, and noted that essential services should be prioritised, and long-term solutions should be considered. The panel wanted to ensure Council would be transparent in pricing and decision-making regarding facility fees.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

Pursuing revenue through commercial choices and investments

The panel as asked to discuss the following question in small groups: “Should Council pursue revenue through commercial choices and investments?” Responses are summarised below.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strong support for revenue generation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <p>Many expressed strong support for revenue generation through commercial and investment choices, noting the potential for joint ventures, partnerships, and innovative approaches to investment.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Potential revenue opportunities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <p>Panel members suggested potential revenue opportunities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Council leverage existing assets like warehouse properties for growth and development</li><li>• property development and investments, such as land purchase, commercial property investments and private-public partnerships in development</li><li>• tourism development e.g., historical sites, nature/wildlife experiences, and seasonal events</li><li>• sustainable and circular economy investments e.g., renewable energy projects, selling carbon credits, green cities</li><li>• research spaces to attract investment from businesses and universities</li><li>• commercial farming to support local food production and employment</li><li>• shopping centres to attract professionals to the area</li><li>• improved marketing and promotion of council-owned facilities to increase utilisation</li><li>• tiered paid parking near shopping centres</li><li>• heavy vehicle charges</li><li>• offering loans for future developments if growth is guaranteed</li><li>• strengthening local law enforcement for commercial compliance.</li></ul> |
| Additional considerations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <p>It was suggested that commercial investments are aligned with community needs and the Community Vision. It was highlighted that any legal risks in Council investments would be carefully managed and that transparency and ethical governance are critical for trust in decision-making. Decisions should be sustainable and long-term, and not just about immediate financial gain.</p> <p>Consideration to the environmental for land development projects was highlighted as important.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

**Guidance on how Council makes investments in assets**

At session #4 the panel was presented with information on how Council’s manages its assets and asked to respond to three questions:

- 1. “How should Council invest in assets over the next 10-years to achieve the Community Vision?”
- 2. “How can we ensure Councils decisions are fair and balanced across different community needs?”
- 3. “What should Council’s approach be if there are assets that are underutilised, have excessive ongoing costs, or are over the Agreed Level of Service?”

The panel discussed the questions in small groups – the responses are summarised below.

**How should Council invest in assets over the next 10-years to achieve the Community Vision?**

Many of the panel suggested using AI and other technological advances for data analysis to improve planning decisions. While it was highlighted that community engagement was important, they also noted that data would aid in defining community needs over wants.

The panel proposed services and activities for community wellbeing, such as healthcare services, creative arts and sporting events and youth focused activities

It was frequently noted climate mitigation and sustainability as key factors in achieving the Vision. It was suggested that new assets must meet high sustainability standards to reduce long-term costs. The panel also listed many sustainability measures such as: renewable energy, solar street lighting and LED lighting, water-saving initiatives, fire-retardant native plant landscaping, reducing Council-maintained lawns and ensuring environmental responsibility in road and infrastructure management.

The panel made connections between environmental sustainability factors and financial sustainability

**How can we ensure Councils decisions are fair and balanced across different community needs?**

The panel frequently suggested engagement and two-way communication with Council and Council staff, engaging with the people who use assets or need services. They included examples of engagement such as voting or referendums, advisory groups and consultative committees to do ongoing work with Council.

Promotion and communication of engagement was frequently highlighted as important. Methods such as an improved website, social media, radio, newsletters and local newspapers, and live streaming of Council meetings was mentioned. There was a suggestion to have increased reporting to community, such as through progress reports.

The panel suggested improved transparency in decision making processes and proposed a standardised set a criteria for needs assessment, informed by data and community needs.

Risk assessment and climate mitigation should be strongly considered in decision making.

**What should council's approach be if there are assets that are underutilized, have excessive ongoing costs, or are over the agreed level of service?**

Many of the panel suggested ways to increase the use of facilities, through advertising, cost incentivisation and changing the function to create multi-use facilities. The panel also noted that it is important to assess the viability and need of facilities, cost efficacy, and the possibility of increasing user fees.

It was suggested that having voluntary committees of management could help to reduce the running costs of facilities, or volunteers to help with maintenance.

Though some of the panel suggested selling assets, leasing or privatisation, others wanted to ensure that Council assets would not be sold or demolished.



# Panel evaluation

Before the start, and at the close of the panel, participants were asked to reflect on their own expectations and experience as a panel member, as well as their trust and confidence in Council, community participation in government decision making, and knowledge of Council planning processes. A total of 34 participants completed the pre-session survey, and 23 completed the post-panel survey. A comparison of pre and post panel survey responses follows.

## Trust and confidence in Council

Two questions were asked to test for change in trust and confidence in Council. There was an increase in confidence that Council would honour the outcomes of this process (+12%), and a slight decrease (-3%) in trust that Council supports community involvement in decision making. The results are in figures 11 and 12.

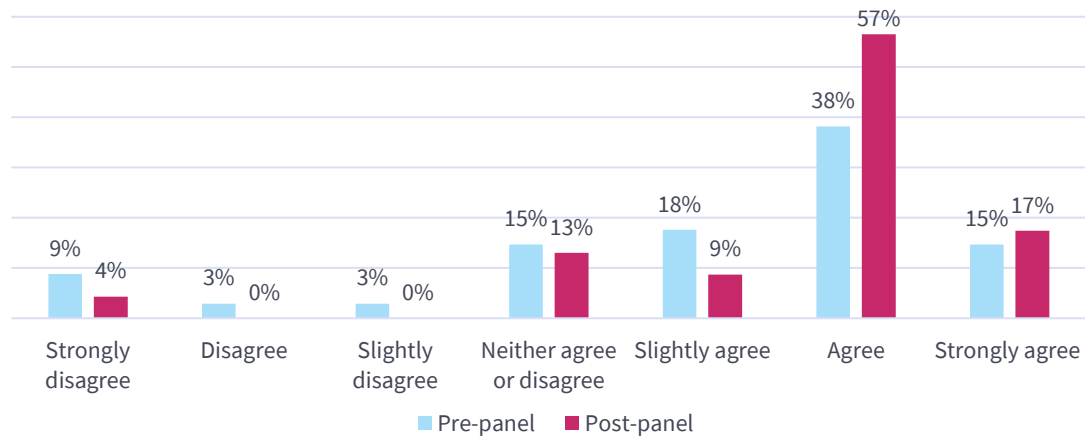


Figure 11: Confidence that Council will honour the outcomes of this process

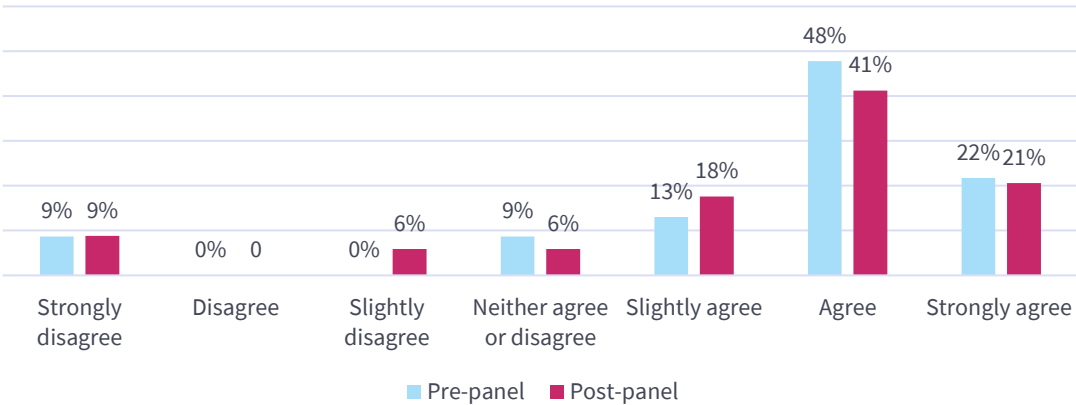


Figure 12: Trust that Council actively supports community involvement in decision making

## Understanding and perception

Panel members’ understanding of Council’s economic environment, and what Council controls and influences both increased (+25% and 17% respectively) as shown in figures 13 and 14.

The panel's understanding of the broader challenges/issues impacting planning in Cardinia fell (-28%), whilst their positive perception of Council regarding the long-term planning of the municipality rose (+25%). See the results in figures 15 and 16).



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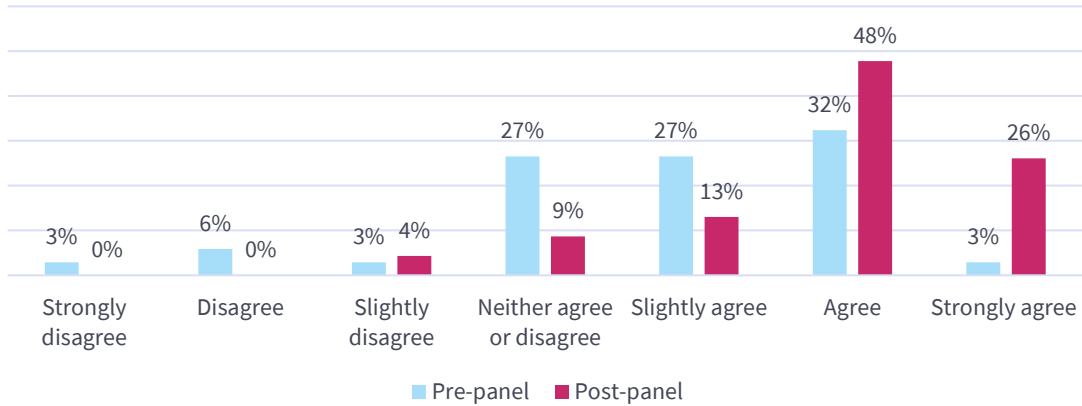


Figure 13: Panel understanding of the economic environment Council is operating within

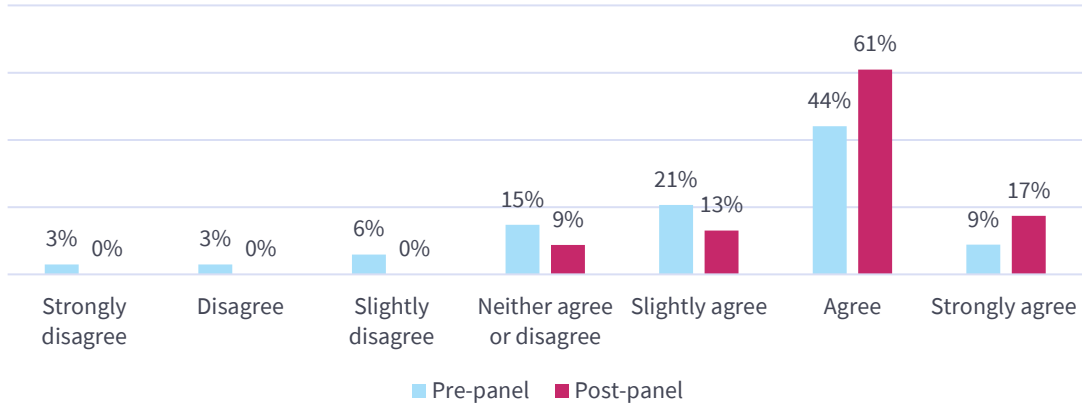


Figure 14: Panel understanding of what decisions are within Council control and influence

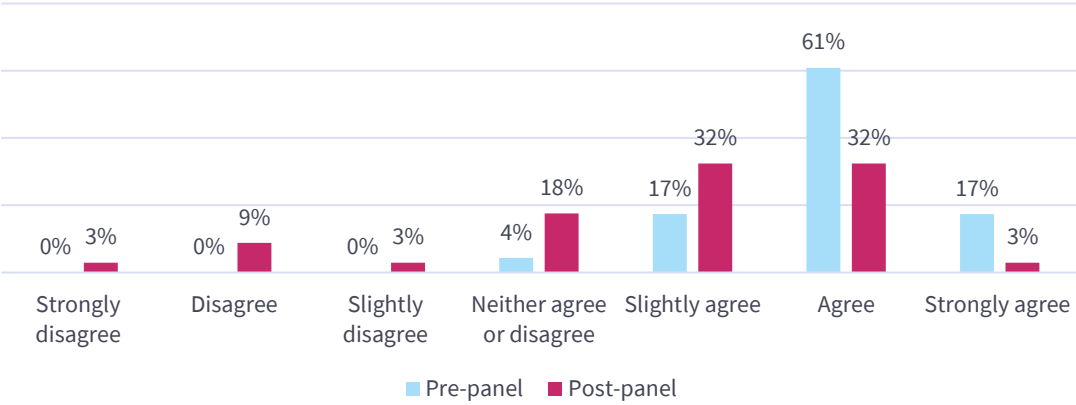


Figure 15: Panel understanding of broader challenges/issues impacting planning in Cardinia

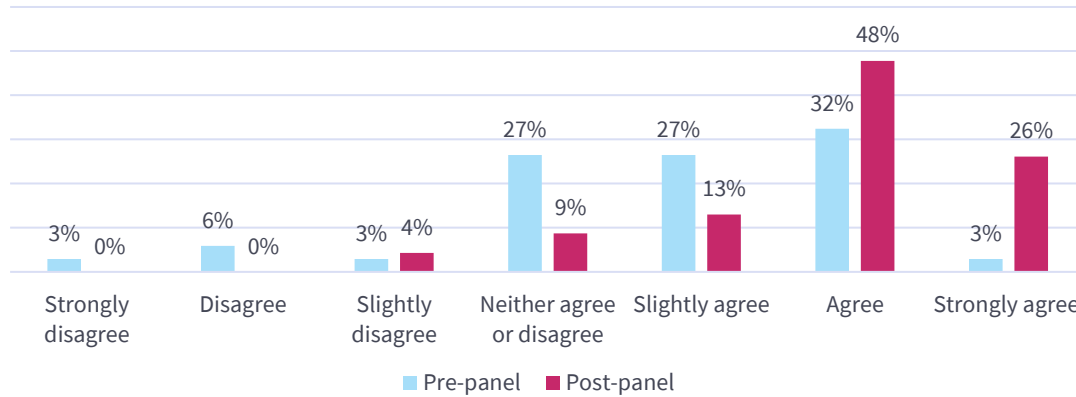


Figure 16: Panel perception of Council regarding the long-term planning of the municipality



Personal knowledge, confidence in engaging, and working together

Panel members provided a self-assessment of their own knowledge and skills. Following the close of the panel, they were less confident in engaging in civic decision making (-10%) and in having the skills and knowledge to contribute to decision-making (-6%). Between the pre and post session survey, the panel’s confidence grew; their confidence in the panel’s ability to work together (+8%).

It is not uncommon for panel members to have a drop in confidence following a panel process, once they have been exposed to the complexity of factors to consider in decision making. Panel members also suggested that they could have used more time in the session to build their understanding.

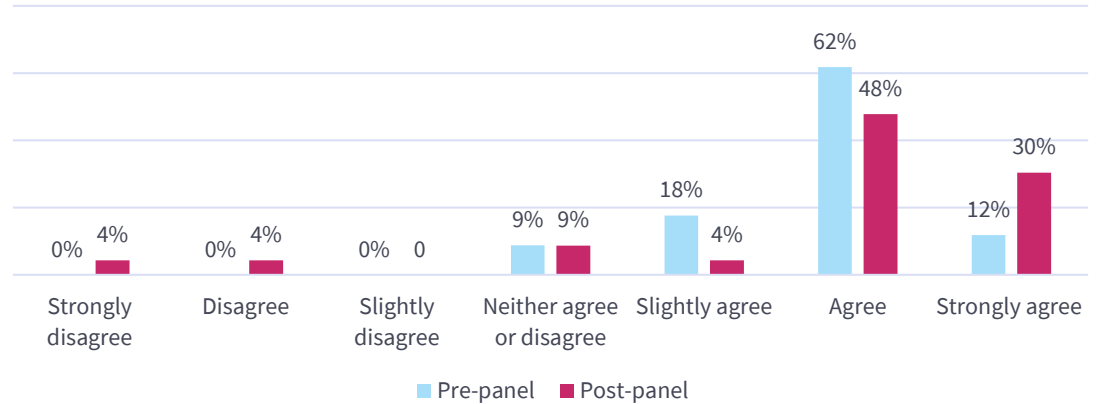


Figure 17: Panel’s confidence in engaging in civic decision-making processes

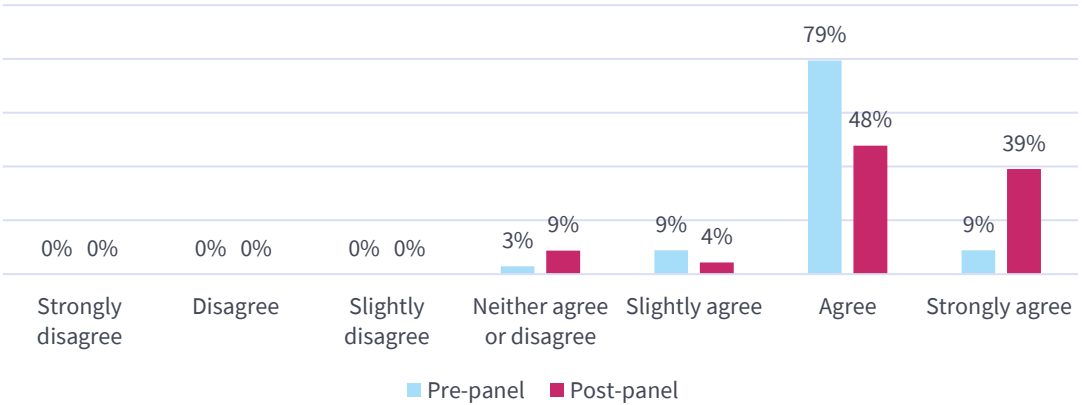


Figure 18: Panel feeling they have the skills and knowledge to contribute to decision-making processes

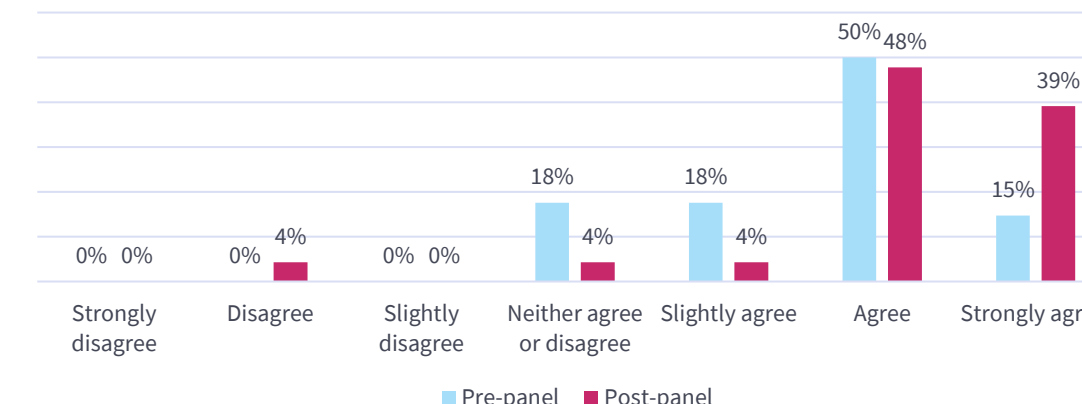


Figure 19: Panel confidence in working together through the process



The pre and post session survey asked additional questions such hopes and expectations. These comments and summarised below. It also included reflection on the recruitment process and session evaluation – these results have been shared with Council.

#### What do you hope to gain/what did you gain?

In the pre-session survey the panel was asked, “What do you hope to gain through your participation in the Future Cardinia Community Panel?”. Most respondents wanted to gain a better understanding of Council operations, decision-making, and planning. They wanted clarity on how policies are developed, how community input is considered, and the Council’s role in shaping the local environment. Others hoped to actively contribute by having their voices heard and advocating for community needs.

The panel wanted to improve quality of life, address key issues, and ensure decisions reflect diverse perspectives. There was also a strong focus on better engagement and connection. The panel sought a more inclusive and transparent Council, stronger community ties, and meaningful involvement in shaping Cardinia’s future.

#### Expectations of the panel

In the pre-session survey the panel was asked, “What are your expectations of the Future Cardinia Community Panel?”. They responded that they expected the panel to provide a platform for discussion, collaboration, and meaningful input. Many hoped their voices would be heard, their concerns considered, and their contributions would influence Council decisions.

The panel valued respectful and constructive discussions where diverse perspectives were included. Some wanted clear information and fair opportunities to speak. While a few were sceptical about the panel’s impact, most remained optimistic about gaining insights, engaging with the community, and shaping Cardinia’s future.

#### Resistance to engagement

Panel members were asked, “What might stop you from getting involved in Council decision making processes?”. They noted barriers including time constraints, family commitments, and personal challenges such as ill health, discouraged participation. Respondents expressed concerns about lengthy meetings, technical challenges and unproductive discussions.

Some felt a lack of knowledge about Council processes would limit their ability to contribute effectively, while others worried that council-driven agendas or a lack of transparency would make their input feel meaningless. However, many remained committed as long as their voices were heard and led to real community benefits.

#### What are you most proud of

In the post-session survey, the panel was asked “What are you most proud of through your participation in the community panel?”. Respondents were proud of their contributions, collaboration, and ensuring all voices were heard. They valued advocating for sustainability, shaping the community vision, and gaining new insights.

The sense of teamwork, meaningful discussions, and collective problem-solving left them feeling accomplished and hopeful for the future. Many noted the respectful discussions, and the connections formed with a diverse range of community members.

#### Challenges in participation

In the post-session survey, the panel was asked, “What did you find most challenging about your participation in the community panel?”. The main challenges participants faced included managing differing perspectives, with strong personalities sometimes dominating discussions and making it difficult for others to contribute. Panel members noted that some participants focused on minor details instead of broader issues.

Time constraints were another issue, as respondents felt rushed and unable to fully engage with the material in depth on a wide variety of topics. Technical issues, such as navigating the online portal and managing virtual tasks, were also noted as challenges.

Some panel members also suggested that there was an overemphasis on providing information, over listening to participants.

#### What advice would you give to a friend who was thinking of participating in a panel like this?

Post-session the panel was asked, “What advice would you give to a friend who was thinking of participating in a panel like this?”. Key themes from the responses emphasise being proactive, prepared, and open-minded. Many of the respondents recommended listening to others, gaining knowledge about the Council’s role, and respecting different opinions.

Several encouraged stepping out of your comfort zone, engaging with diverse perspectives, and being willing to speak up in discussions.

Overall, most respondents strongly recommended getting involved, with several noting that the activity would provide valuable learning experiences and opportunities to help the community.

#### Other comments

Panel members were asked if they had any other comments to provide. Many noted that they enjoyed the panel and the opportunity to meet new people. Overall, they thought that the sessions were well facilitated, though some suggested speaking more slowly and ensuring simple language to improve understanding of complex information.

Participants also noted that some activities could have been broken into smaller groups, to allow quieter participants to be heard. They also wanted an opportunity to discuss issues with Council that fell outside of the scope of questions asked.



*Thank you*



Success. Mapped.

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