



KIAMA MUNICIPAL COUNCIL  
your council. your community

# Your community, ***your say***

A vibrant diversity of voices



## Community Engagement Report

### *Your community, your say*

Phase 1: Consultation (co-design)

13 March – 2 April 2024

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# Introduction

This report presents the results of the co-design phase of the community engagement consultation to draft Kiama Municipal Council’s Community Engagement Strategy.

Kiama Council is committed to developing a culture of meaningful community engagement to achieve better and more sustainable outcomes for the municipality. Insights from the co-design consultation are used to re-draft the Community Engagement Strategy as a practical framework for Council to engage with diverse voices across our community, businesses and other stakeholders in a meaningful and measurable way. It will also form actions for delivery that will be commitments made to our community through our Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework – namely the delivery program and operational plan.

Our engagement with community on the draft Strategy does not end here. During the exhibition process, we will continue to gather feedback and actively engage with stakeholders, including but not limited to youth, First Nations groups, the business community and more.

## Who we engaged

A series of engagement activities were delivered in early 2024 to guide the development of the Strategy.

### Community consultation

- Spoke to 160+ individuals and handed out flyers to more than 1,000 people at community pop-ups across eight locations in our Municipality
- Met with various committees and stakeholder groups, including:
  - Kiama High Student Representative Council
  - Kiama Area Precincts Alliance
  - Liveability and Infrastructure Committee
  - Sustainable Communities Committee
- Received 240+ “Your community, your say” survey responses

### Staff consultation

- Organised a workshop with Councillors
- Facilitated a cross-departmental staff workshop with 29 participants
- Received 20+ responses to the Council staff survey
- Conducted interviews with executives and key staff members



# What we heard – summary

## Internal: want Council to engage by

- building staff capacity and providing practical tools
- making engagement meaningful and seeking diversity of voices
- closing the loop – communicating outcomes and delivering on commitments
- meeting the community where they are, building trust
- however, note that time and resources are significant barriers to overcome

## Community: want Council to

- improve how they follow-up with people on outcomes and decisions
- be clear and transparent about processes, timelines and level of community influence
- reach a greater variety of people by meeting them where they are
- engage more with youth and other communities of need
- be more visible and listen

## Receive Council information

1. Local newspapers (56%)
2. Regular e-newsletter (42%)
3. Council website (41%),
4. Council's Facebook page (41%)
5. Brochures in letterbox (38%).

## Provide Council with input

1. Filling out a survey (64%),
2. Writing a letter or email (48%),
3. Quick online polls (44%)
4. Talking to council staff (37%)
5. Online forums (26%)

## Engage on

1. Town planning and development (65%)
2. Opportunities to provide feedback on Council projects etc (48%)
3. Environment and land/coastal management (35%)
4. Parks, venues, playgrounds, recreational facilities etc (34%)
5. Roadworks and infrastructure (26%)



"It sounds like you're asking the right questions"

"We love the village atmosphere, we want to keep our open spaces"

"In 52 years in the area, there's been lots of change!"

"Progress can be qualitative not quantitative"

"Youth are often not interested in engaging with council, too busy with other things!"

"Council needs to repair the community's trust before it can move forward"

"Ratepayers are looking for outcomes, not more talk"

"You can reach young parents at the gym, pre-schools, Leisure centre and daycares"

"Growth is OK but we need the infrastructure to support it"

"Council needs to close the loop and be transparent"

"If we spend time making a submission, we really want to know how our input has made a difference"

# Detailed consultation insights

## Kiama Council Executive and key staff interviews

Interviewees were supportive of improving Council's community engagement efforts, and expressed a desire to make engagement more meaningful, seeking a diversity of voices, 'meeting community where they are' and reducing focus on the minority of 'loud voices' who can dominate.

Capacity and resourcing were seen as key issues across all departments and teams. A desire to build staff capacity was expressed, with interviewees eager to build their skills and knowledge, particularly around 'closing-the-loop' on engagement projects. Tools and templates were frequently mentioned to deliver consistent engagement throughout Council.

Communication was seen as an area for significant improvement, with a desire to provide community with timely information about Council activities – from both strategic and day-to-day operations perspectives. While innovation and creativity was welcomed, it was noted that the Community Engagement Strategy should provide a practical framework that allows Council to plan and deliver engagement activities with the resources they currently have.

## Staff and Councillor workshops

Findings from the staff and Councillor workshops indicate a desire to engage with a diverse cross-section of community, and to be proactive in 'meeting community where they are'. To do this, building capacity within Council and in the community was seen as essential. For Council, this means having tools and templates to effectively plan, implement and close the loop on engagement. For community, this means being provided with the right information and knowing how they can get involved.

However, time and resourcing were seen as significant barriers to undertaking meaningful two-way engagement, with staff commenting that the substantial prep work required to deliver activities was disruptive to project delivery timeframes. Additionally, engagement fatigue was highlighted as a potential issue within the small community. With this in mind, staff highlighted the need to ask community how they want be engaged by Council and what topics/issues they are most interested in.

Relationship building was seen as necessary to improving the community's trust in Council. Clarity and transparency were seen as essential, especially with regards to what community can and can't influence. When considering the strategy itself, a simple, high-level document was preferred, utilising visual communication such as flowcharts and process maps as opposed to lists and heavy text.



## Council committees and KAPA meetings

Attendees are highly active, articulate and engaged on Council matters and indicated a desire for more information to be shared, a willingness and expectation to be consulted on Council decisions and a general wish for increased transparency around how Council decisions are made and enacted.

'Closing the loop' was a common theme – with many participants expressing frustration that their feedback, questions or suggestions could sometimes to 'disappear' - eg: a lack of updates or outcomes of consultations and/or not being notified of results (having to search Council website or business papers themselves, rather than receiving an email or phone call or in-person update), or not receiving a reply email or follow-up call to an enquiry.

The idea of creating a 'Kiama 100' representative group was highly approved by some, others had reservations.

Some of the Precinct and Association (P&A) office-bearers are dissatisfied with their minutes no longer being in Council's business papers and would like their groups to be promoted by Council as a conduit for community views. Council has advised these meeting minutes can be published on the Precincts and Associations' own websites with a link from Council's site.

P&A members felt their organisations have a role in directing locale-based matters to Council and therefore wanted a strategy that recognises the different needs of different locations.

It was also recognised that the P&As not representative of the whole community and are struggling to attract new and younger members to their groups.

Committees expressed a willingness and interest in being more 'useful' and asked: "What can we do".

Council staff reiterated that, while the P&As and committees are a valued part of our community engagement mix, we are looking to increase the diversity of voices and reach out to those who are less-often heard.

## Youth consultation

Kiama Council's Community Hubs Manager, Youth Worker, and Community Engagement Officer engaged with Kiama High School's Student Representative Council (SRC) to discuss effective methods of involving youth in important topics such as growth and housing.

The meeting's insights emphasised that young people have busy lives and a lot on their plates; meeting them where they are and integrating engagement activities within existing commitments works well, eg: as part of a school term/period. Clear communication about the purpose, level of influence and outcomes of engagement activities are crucial. Graphic recording of workshops was highlighted as a great and interactive way to achieve this.

Several recommendations were put forward, including tailoring discussion topics to align with youth interests and leveraging tools like sticky notes for anonymous contributions, creative mediums, and interactive games. Drawing from past successful experiences like the 2022 Housing and Recreation & Outdoor Spaces Youth Workshop, the group emphasised providing clear instructions, fostering interactive sessions, and facilitating connections between participants and local leaders, such as the mayor, councillors and staff. Furthermore, there was a suggestion to incorporate a career-oriented perspective and focus on themes like the future, sustainability, and environmental awareness to enhance engagement among young audiences.

SRC students also expressed an interest in co-designing and leading engagement activities for their peers. Engaging young people can be used as an avenue to reach their often-busy parents.

## Your community, your say – Community survey

Our public survey was open from 13 to 28 March. It asked how our community members (and/or groups/businesses/organisations) wanted to engage with Council and, how they wanted Council to engage with them.

The survey had around 250 responses (approximately representative of 1% of the population of Kiama LGA) via digital and on-paper. The largest group of respondents were aged 65-84 (38%) followed by age 55-64 (19%), 45-54 (17%) and 35-44 (16%), however we received responses in all age brackets, including respondents aged under 18 and 85+.

Demographics: The largest cohort had lived in the Kiama Municipality for 10+ years (60%). 35% of respondents were retirees, 28% working full time, 19% work part time and 21% regularly volunteer, with 6% of respondents identifying as a local business owner. Around 4% of survey respondents identified as living with a disability, 3% identified as LGBTQIA+ and 3% as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Please note that people could identify themselves as multiple categories in this question. (see demographics graph page 9).

Resident breakdown: the largest number of respondents lived in Kiama township (40%), followed by 15% in Jamberoo, 15.5% Kiama Downs and 8% Gerringong, with responders also from Foxground, Gerroa, Jerrara, Kiama Heights, Minnamurra and Saddleback Mountain.

Top 5 topics people want to engage on:

1. Town planning and Development (65%)
2. Opportunities to provide feedback on Council projects etc (48%)
3. Environment and land/coastal management (35%)
4. Parks, venues, playgrounds, recreational facilities etc (34%)
5. Roadworks & Infrastructure (26%)

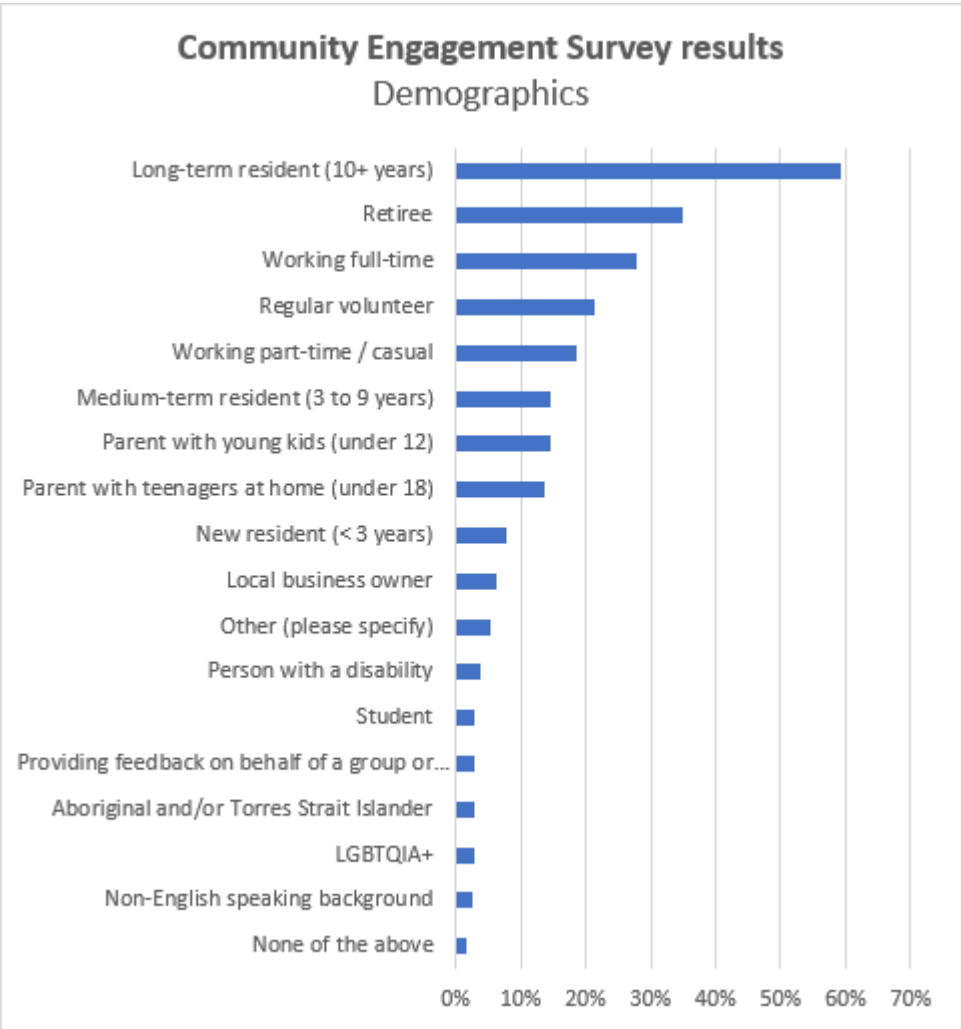
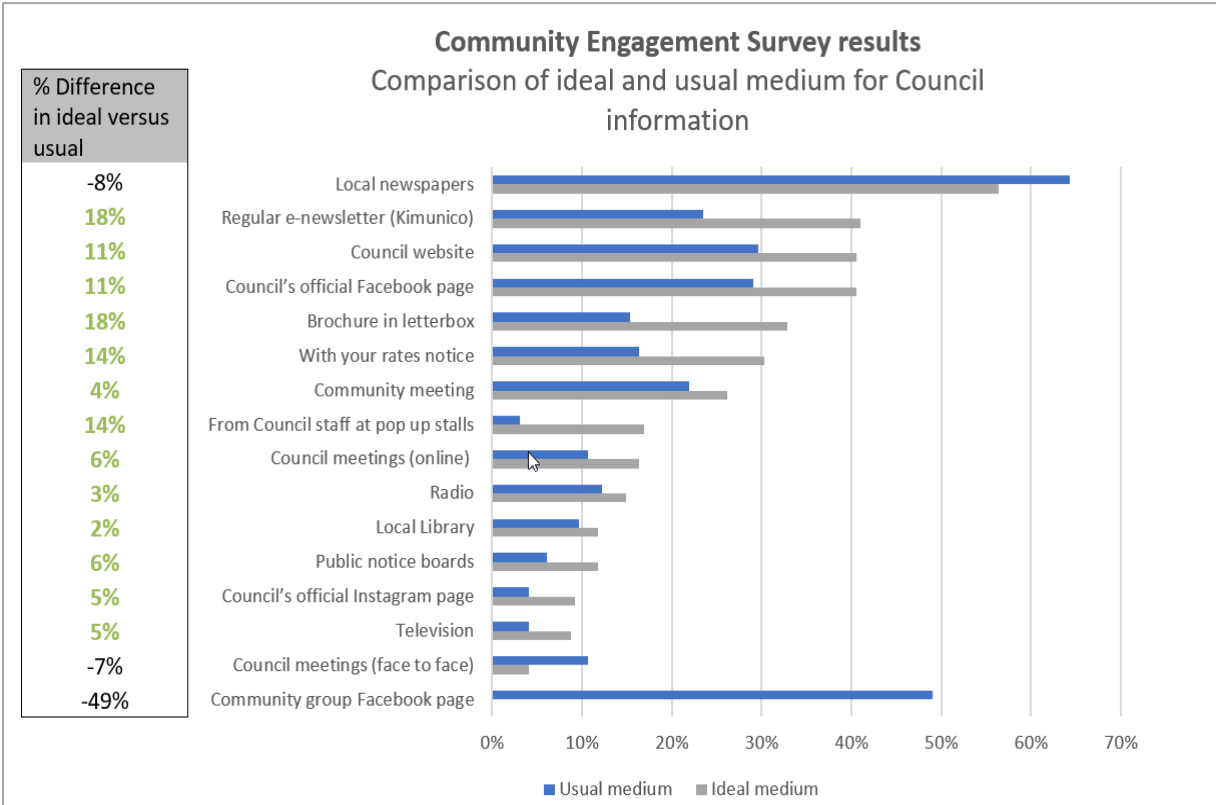
The most common methods respondents get their information on Council happenings is from local newspapers (64%), community groups on Facebook (49%), the Council website (30%), Council's official Facebook page (29%) and Council's e-newsletter Kimunico (23%).

The preferred mediums for receiving Council information include local newspapers (56%) (note: 'local' was not defined), regular e-newsletter (42%), Council website (41%), Council's official Facebook page (41%) and brochures in letterbox (38%). This data guides Council to prioritise these mediums to engage with community, noting time and budgetary constraints.

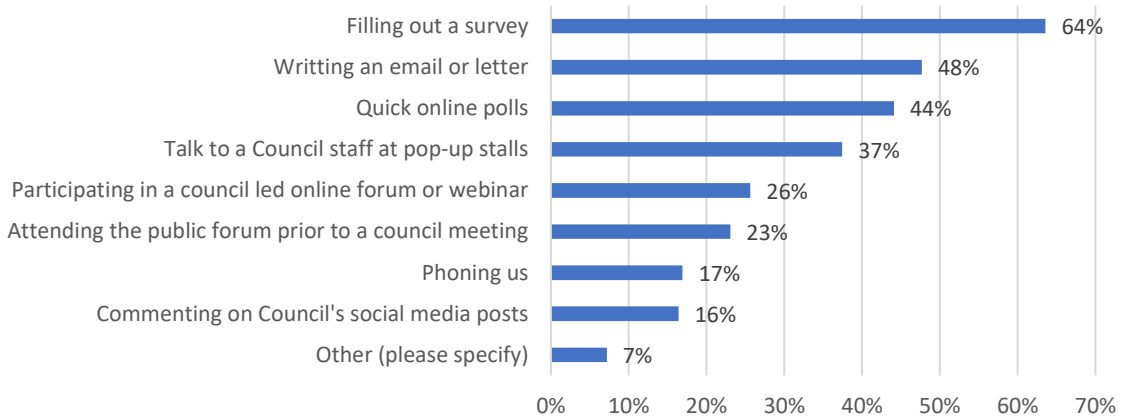
While 42% indicated a preference for regular e-newsletters, only 18% said they were currently subscribed, with comparable figures for interest/ update of brochures in letterboxes, indicating these could be areas for improvement. It is also worth flagging that Council includes a flyer with its quarterly rates notice as standard (sent via email or post, depending on preference of each individual ratepayer) The survey itself resulted in an additional 40+ subscribers to Council's monthly Kimunico e-newsletter.

While Community Group Facebook pages are well utilised (49%) to access Council information, they are not officially managed by Council and hence were not included as an ideal option. However, Council has good contacts with the administrators of these pages, and information is regularly replicated and shared via these channels.



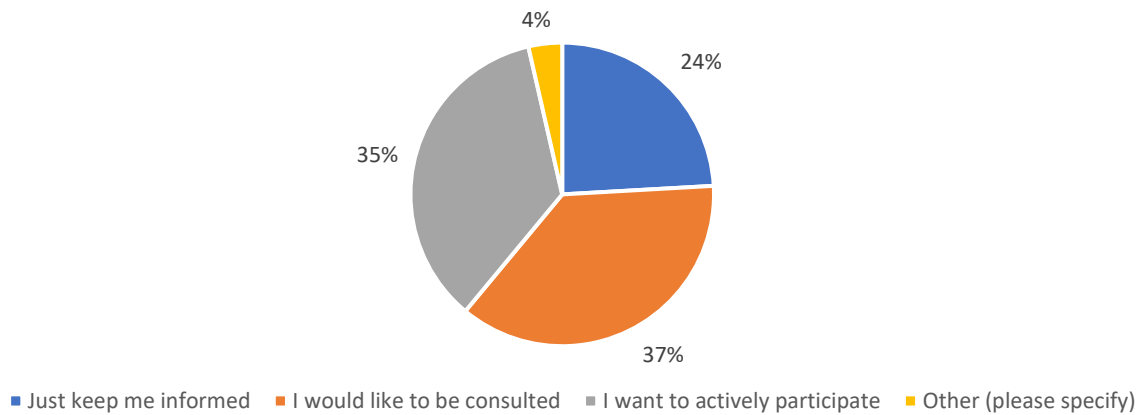


### Community Engagement Survey results Medium for providing input to Council



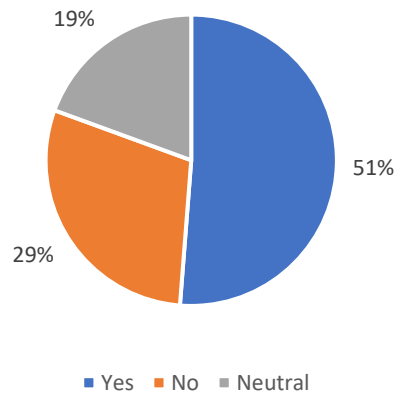
Most survey respondents indicated they would like to tell Council their thoughts by filling out a survey (64%), writing a letter or email (48%), quick online polls or talking to council staff (37%). This data will guide the Council in prioritising these channels to engage with the community. Overall feedback (incl. comments provided in "Other" option) highlighted a desire for Council to provide a combination of online and in-person engagement methods.

### Community Engagement Survey results Level of desired involvement in decision-making



The majority (72%) of survey respondents were interested in being involved in Council's decision-making. The Strategy highlights a variety of methods and tools for the community to be involved and participate in decision-making. It's also important for Council to make clear to community how much influence they can have on each decision, to manage expectations and avoid negative backlash.

## Community Engagement Survey results Kiama 100 Representative Group



More than half of survey respondents (51%) supported the Kiama 100 initiative, which aims to capture the diversity of voices within our community.

Opponents (29%) raised concerns regarding the feasibility of establishing such a group, its adequacy in representing the full spectrum of community voices, exclusion of community experts, risk of vested interests, and the resource-intensive nature of focusing solely on 100 voices. Council will consider this concept in more detail once the Community Engagement Strategy is endorsed

Key findings overall on how Council can engage more meaningfully with the diversity of voices in the community include:

- Meeting community where they are eg: at school, pre-schools, markets
- Clear and consistent in engagement
- Close the loop to ensure community feels heard and valued
- Don't pander to minorities/noisy complainers
- Use more innovative engagement tools
- Increasing visibility and actively listening to community feedback.

A further breakdown of survey results will be included in the engagement report when the Strategy is finalised.

## Community pop-ups

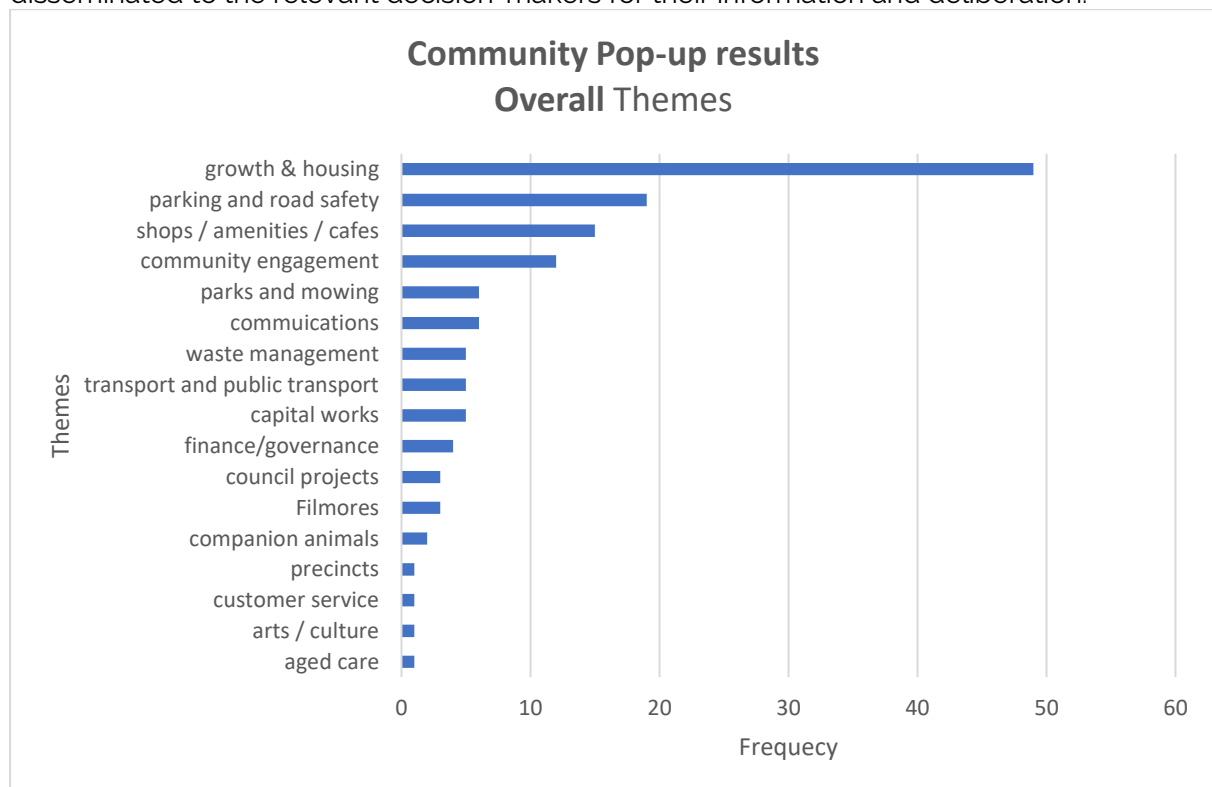
Council staff reached more than 1,000 residents, including holding in-depth conversations with around 160 people across the Municipality at our Household Bulky Waste event and community pop-ups.

The community pop-ups were held outside Kiama Downs/Gainsborough Foodworks, Kiama Downs IGA, Minnamurra Café, Jamberoo IGA, Gerringong IGA, Gerroa General Store and Kiama Farmers Market and were timed for maximum foot traffic on Friday and Saturday to ensure a good reach across our various localities and to reach people where they were, many of whom do not have the time or inclination to get in touch with Council otherwise.

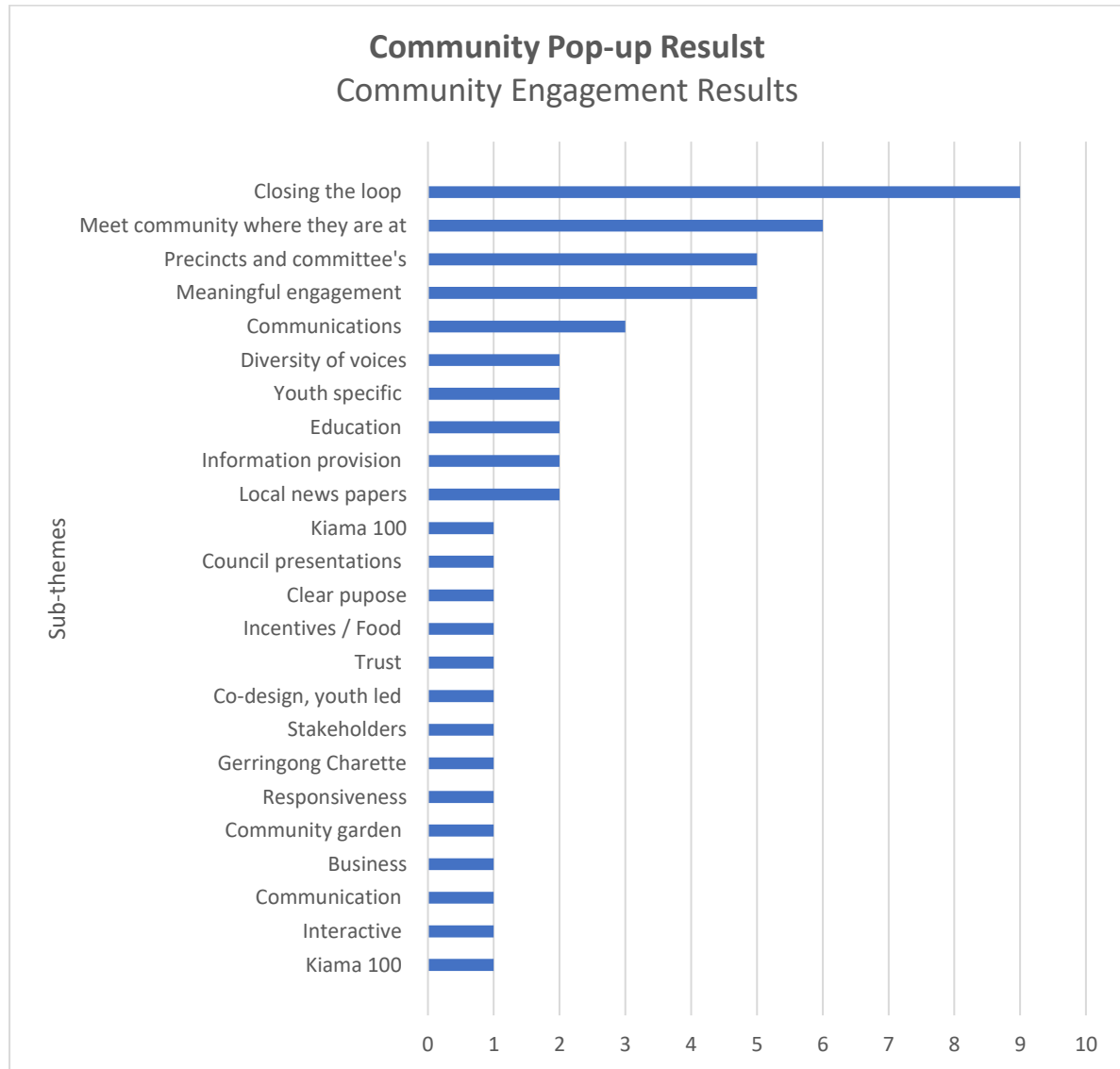
Although not able to deeply engage with everyone, those who were handed flyers were given a brief introduction to explain Council is developing Community Engagement and Growth & Housing strategies and encouraged to take the online survey.

Many expressed appreciation at seeing Council "out and about" and engaging in these discussions. Council's Community Engagement team is keen to make these a regular occurrence and will look to include pop-ups as part of engagement planning and schedules going forward.

Below is a table indicating the main themes discussed with members of the public at our community pop-ups and Household Bulky Waste event. Where possible, feedback will be disseminated to the relevant decision-makers for their information and deliberation.



Below is a table indicating the sub-themes within the Community Engagement realm discussed with members of the public at our community pop-ups and Household Bulky Waste event.



The feedback gained during the phase 1/ co-design period has provided a range of insights that were considered when developing the Draft Community Engagement Strategy. These insights will also form the basis of the development and improvement of Council's Community Engagement Toolkit, templates and future engagement activities.

## Next steps

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The Draft Strategy was endorsed by Council for public exhibition at its Ordinary Meeting on 16 April 2024 as follows:

Resolution 24/097OC.

Resolved that Council:

1. Endorse the draft Community Engagement Strategy for public exhibition for a period of 28 days.
2. Note if submissions are received during the exhibition period a further report, including an engagement report will be provided on any proposed amendments to the Strategy.
3. Adopt the Community Engagement Strategy if no submissions are received, on the day after the completion of the public exhibition period. (Councillors Larkins and Draisma)

### Next steps

- 1. Public exhibition of draft strategy**

The Draft Strategy has been placed on public exhibition for 28 days until 17 May 2024. Council staff will continue to actively engage during the exhibition period with stakeholders including but not limited to youth, First Nations groups, the business community and more. This will provide community and stakeholders with another opportunity to have their say.
- 2. Consideration feedback**

Feedback and insights from the exhibition period will be collected and collated alongside data already gathered during the co-design period to further refine the Strategy.
- 3. Council endorsement**

The final Strategy will be reported back to Council for adoption, including a Community Engagement Report outlining how feedback received during the consultation phases shaped and informed the Strategy.
- 4. Post Local Government Elections review**

Council will be asked to once again review the Community Engagement Strategy. It is hoped that, given all the hard work that is going into the Strategy now, this process can be streamlined and will take the form of a minor review, thus freeing the new Council to direct their focus to high-level strategic documents such as the Community Strategic Plan and important and pressing matters such as Council's ongoing Performance Improvement Order.

Have your say:

<https://www.kiama.nsw.gov.au/Council/Your-say/Community-Engagement-Strategy>