



Knox Community Panel

**Final Report
January 2017**

Introduction & Background

Introduction

Throughout 2016, a range of data was collected and community engagement activities conducted to inform the development of a new plan for the City of Knox. The research and activities conducted have provided insight into the community's priorities and areas they believe Council should invest and direct effort toward over the next four years.

The Community Panel was an important part of Knox's community engagement. Beginning in August 2016, Council officers met with a group of Knox residents to discuss the challenges facing local government, and Knox in particular, now and into the future.

The richness of the conversations as described in the following report will be a significant input into Council's planning process and was an extremely valuable exercise for Council and the Panel members alike.

Background

Local government in Victoria is faced with a number of challenges, of which the most recent is rate capping, the considerable shifts in federal and state policy and funding arrangements impacting on services delivered by councils, and significant cost shifting. These more recent pressures are causing councils across Victoria to re-examine their role and purpose, their relationship to other tiers of government, and the services they deliver.

In addition to these trends, local government exists in a larger, ongoing environment of change, including change within its communities, changes in expectations of local government, technological changes, and a changing natural environment. And even more recently the state government began a review of the Local Government Act, suggesting further changes.

In Victoria, Councils are legislatively required to adopt a Council Plan every four years, by 30 June after the election of a new Council. Knox currently has the *Knox City Plan (incorporating the Council Plan) 2013-17* which describes the outcomes required to progress the City towards the achievement of the aspirations described in the Knox Vision and it expires on 30 June 2017.

The Integrated City Strategy was developed in 2014 and sought to create a single point of focus to implement the City Plan, removing competing strategic activities and duplication of effort, and ultimately achieve the Knox Vision. The Integrated City Strategy will be included in the new planning document, creating a single point of reference for the city.

State of Knox Report

The State of Knox Report – Second Edition provides a narrative (informed by data tables) that identifies and explores the key social, health, political, cultural, environmental and economic issues in Knox. It explores how things have changed since the first edition State of Knox Report and compares Knox with metropolitan (or in some cases, State) averages.

Community Engagement

The community engagement input for the new City Plan included the following components:

Municipal Survey:

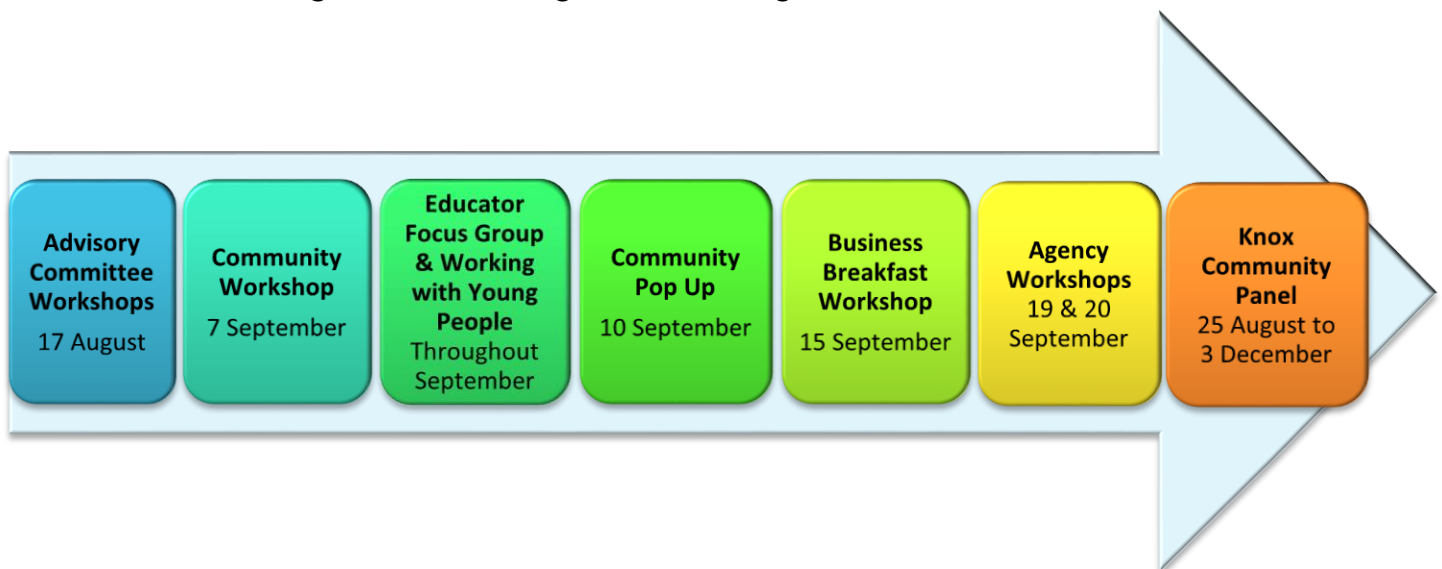
Knox City Council, in consultation with newFocus Research, developed a Municipal Survey to help capture community opinions. The survey included three components:

1. A random sample telephone survey was conducted of 800 Knox residents and 200 Knox business owners.
2. An open online survey that included a general version as well as specific versions tailored to representatives of community groups, young people 14-18 years old, and Knox staff and elected officials.
3. Supplementary in-person interviews specifically for groups that may not participate in telephone or online surveys.

Over 1,650 surveys were received, including over 110 staff members at Council. The results of the survey combined with the data from the State of Knox provided a sound starting point to identify:

- what's important to people about Knox;
- how satisfied people are with the area;
- how things have changed over the four years;
- areas that need to be focused on for the future; and
- priority areas for Knox Council to focus on for the future.

The face-to-face consultations designed to inform the draft Community Plan 2017-2021 involved a range of activities, staged between August and December 2016:



Workshops, Focus Groups & Community Pop-ups:

These activities were conducted predominantly in August and September with members of the general public, members of Council's advisory committees, educators, young people, business people and key agencies and stakeholders. In broad terms, these consultation activities sought to:

- set the scene by providing an overview of the State of Knox, Municipal Survey and other research contributing to the development of the Community Plan;
- prioritise critical issues as reflected in this current/emerging context; and

- have a conversation about the future direction and partnership opportunities, in a preliminary way, by identifying and discussing the work of key agencies and stakeholders.

Knox Community Panel:

The Knox Community Panel was a new initiative undertaken by Knox City Council and was a little different to other types of engagement activities such as Citizens Juries in that it was not a decision making body. It also allowed for the Panel members to gain a deeper understanding of the Knox City Council and local government in general. The purpose of the Panel was to provide input into the future direction of Council's services, activities and infrastructure, within the context of growing financial constraints.

The aim was to connect with a group of people that represented the different aspects of the Knox community and

- discuss community priorities based on the engagement activities conducted to date;
- discuss in detail the challenges Council faces over the next few years; and
- provide feedback on how to approach those challenges including an indication of priorities in order to inform the development of the new Community Plan.

About the Knox Community Panel

Establishment of the Knox Community Panel

Knox benchmarked a number of different councils in Melbourne and Sydney and found they had consistently recruited 40 participants to similar engagement projects. This number was considered large enough to allow for a representative sample featuring the major population characteristics of a municipality, but not so large that the group cannot be well facilitated through discussions on complex topics. This is the number that Knox also aimed to recruit for the Knox Community Panel.

The emphasis of the Knox Community Panel (the Panel) was to provide an opportunity for the 'average' community member or business owner to participate in a process to discuss priorities and provide feedback on Council's challenges. The panel membership aimed to be as representative as possible of the major characteristics of the Knox community. Therefore, the suggested characteristics to recruit for the Panel were that the members be representative of:

- different service age groups from 18+ years
- gender balance
- cultural diversity (born overseas versus born in Australia)
- people with and without children
- employed versus unemployed
- business owners as well as community members

It was also decided that Panel members should not include:

- those who have a connection to Knox Council currently or in the past in relation to the following roles – employee, Councillor, advisory committee members
- current office bearers in any Knox community group

Council endorsed the criteria for selection of Knox Community Panel members, however recruitment was conducted by a professional recruitment company. This was to ensure that the membership was chosen through an independent and arms length process.

Council appointed a market research recruitment agency, Focus People, to conduct the recruitment for the Knox Community Panel. Focus People made telephone contact with over 2500 people who either lived or owned a business in the municipality, as well as using email and Facebook posts to recruit.

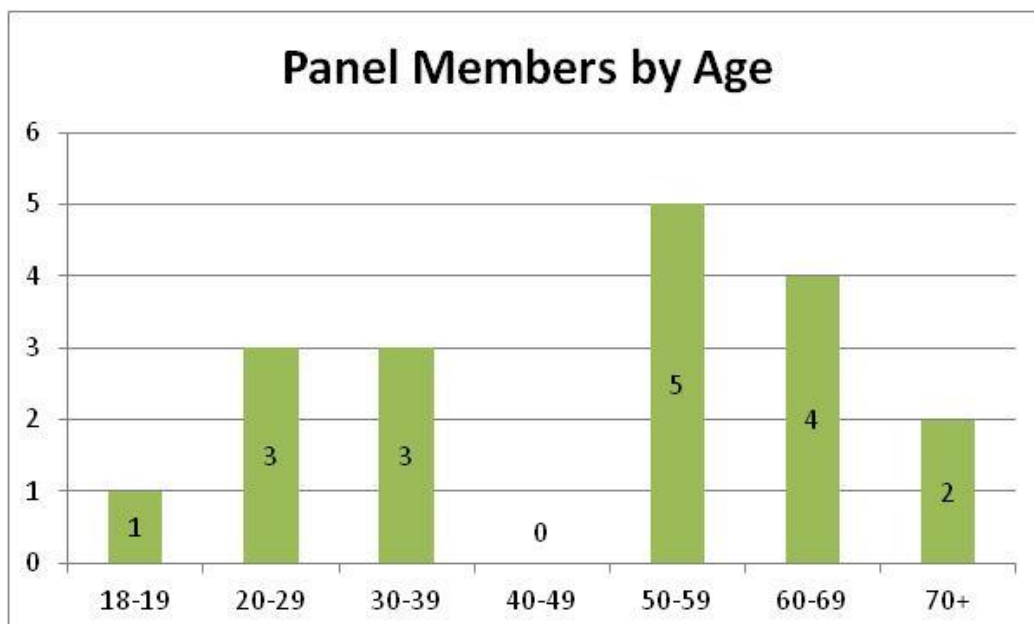
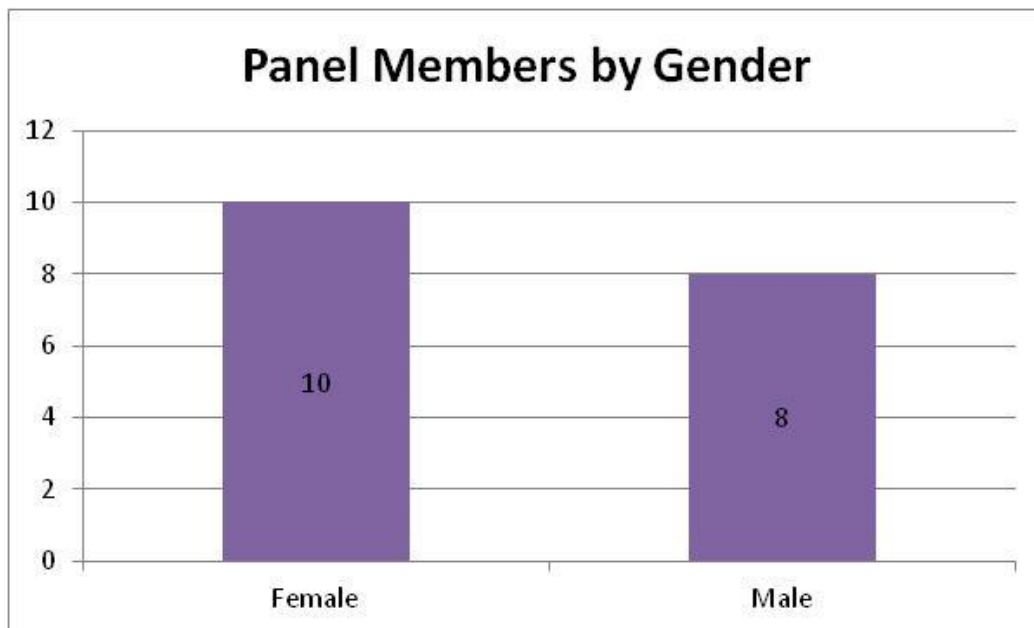
Despite their best efforts, only 29 people initially agreed to be part of the Knox Community Panel, however only 24 people attended on Day 1. The reasons given for not wanting to be part of Knox's community engagement project included not being paid enough (participants were paid \$100 per day) or not being paid at the end of each day (participants were not paid until the end of the project in December).

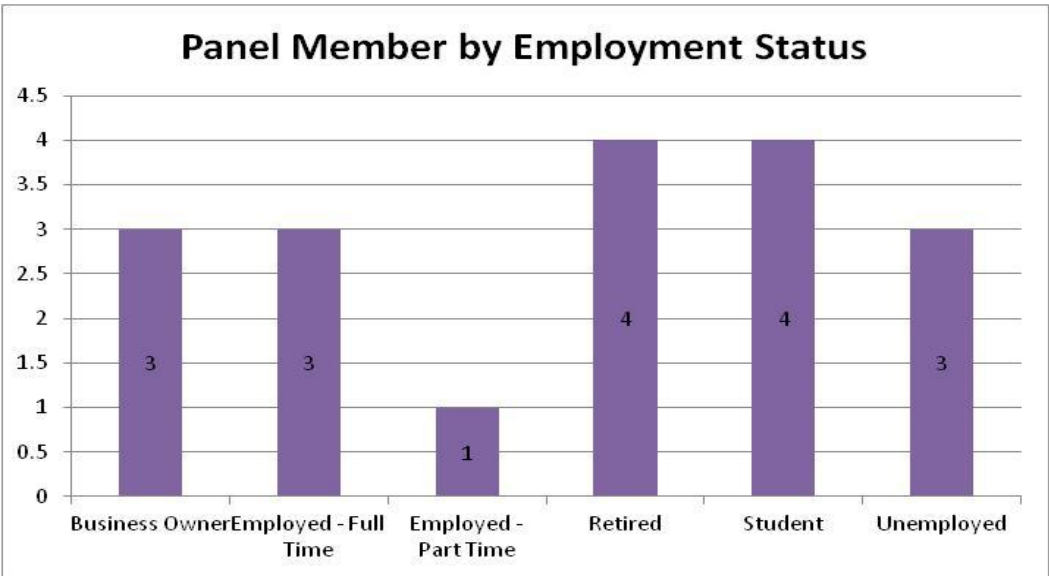
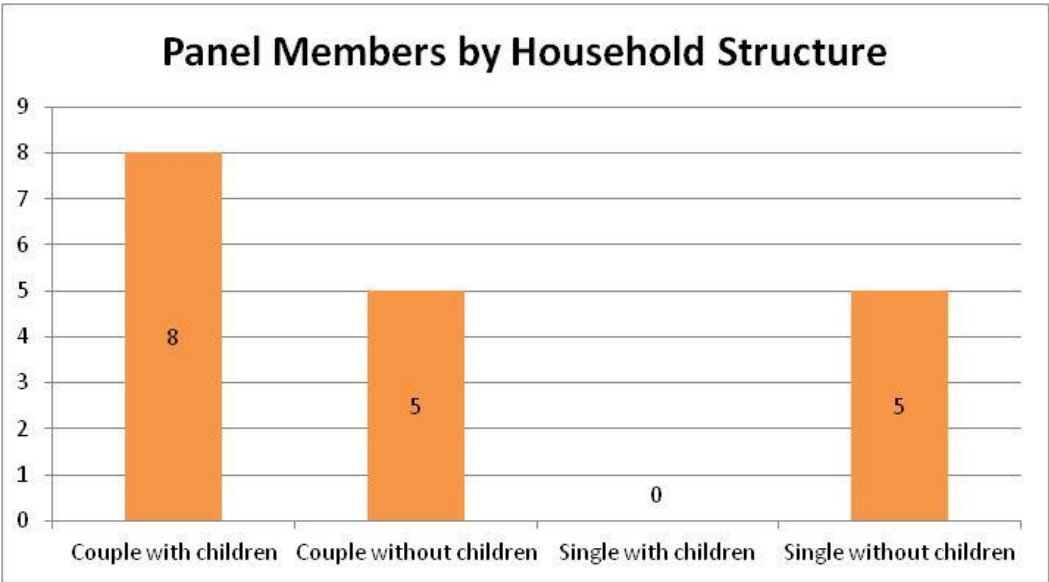
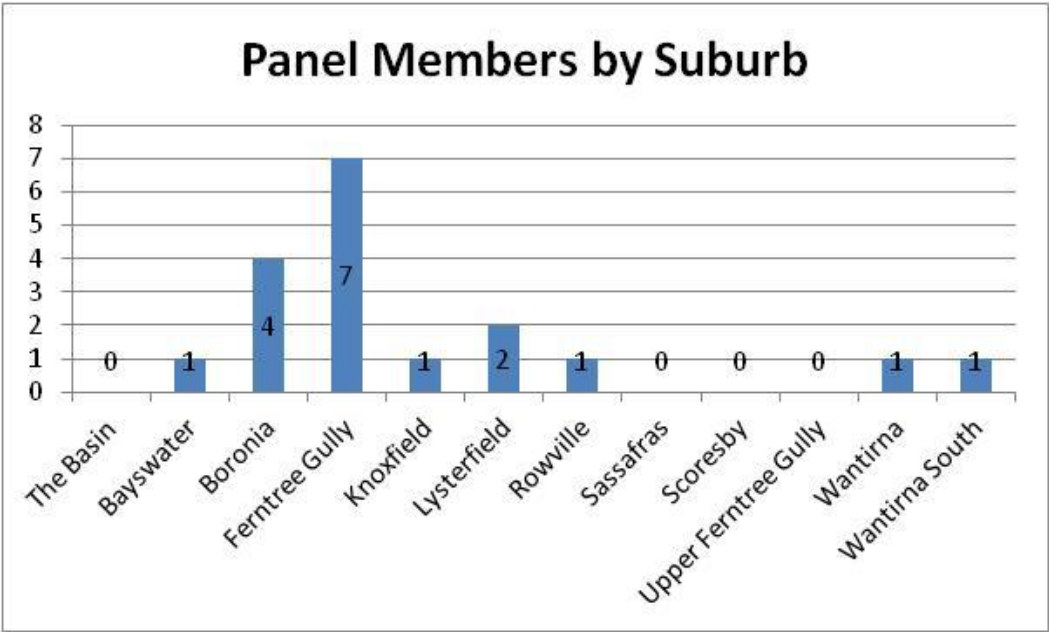
It must be acknowledged that the Knox Community Panel was a big commitment with participants agreeing to participate in five full day sessions, held on Saturdays spanning three months having been given limited information about the Panel's scope of discussions. This approach was done intentionally to be able to reach community

members and business owners that may not necessarily have had much contact with Council before.

Community Panel Profile

Over the course of the five days, the Knox Community Panel membership fell slightly in numbers. Five people did not return to the Community Panel on Day 2, and one further person did not return on Day 3. 18 people (10 females and 8 males) remained with the Panel for the full five days. The demographics of those members of the Panel were as follows:





One of the members identified as being from a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) background (Mandarin speaking) and there was one business owner on the Community Panel. These groups, CALD and business owners, were identified by Focus People as the most difficult to recruit for this project.

Role and Responsibilities

Applicants were interviewed and assessed by the recruiter, Focus People, to ensure they fully understood the commitment of the time required for the Knox Community Panel.

The Knox Community Panel sessions were held from 10am to 4pm on the following days:

- Saturday 27 August
- Saturday 10 September
- Saturday 5 November
- Saturday 19 November
- Saturday 3 December

Due to the Council Election Period, the Panel process was suspended for approximately eight weeks.

The Panel members arrived on Day 1 and were given more information about the process, the topics to be covered and information about their role and responsibility.

The Panel was asked to propose feedback and give suggestions in relation to Council's challenges, particularly with regard to the environment of financial constraint. They had **no authority** to:

- make decisions;
- determine the service Council is or is not providing; or
- propose the amount of any future rate cap variations that may be applied for.

They were also asked to act with integrity and respect, have no contact with the media, and maintain in strictest confidence all information that was marked as confidential.

Facilitation and Panel Support

The Knox Community Panel was coordinated and administered by a number of Knox Council staff members. However each day was facilitated by a consultant, Chris Kotur who was supported by a professional writer Alma Ryrie-Jones.

Chris Kotur - facilitator

Chris is well known in local government circles for her dedication to and highly successful work with communities, and with councils and their diverse range of stakeholders.

Chris is an expert in governance, strategy and leadership development and is currently Leader in Residence at Leadership Victoria. She is a strategic advisor to local government providing professional services for planning, strengthening culture and developing what councils need to know and be able to solve complex problems and bring about successful change during challenging or risky times.

Chris facilitated consultations for the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission during the difficult months after Black Saturday. She was then asked to undertake this role for the 2011 Flood Review and for the Emergency and Fire Services Commissioners in communities affected by the Harrietville fires and again for the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiries. During 2015 she conducted consultations for the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the EPA Review.

Chris was an invaluable facilitator of and contributor to the Knox Community Panel. She worked with council staff to develop agendas for each of the days with the Panel. Due to her significant experience, she was able to capture the attention of the Community Panel, speak to them at a level that made them feel comfortable and facilitate the sessions with ease. As seen in the evaluation section of this report (pages 19 and 20), she was very well received.

Alma Ryrie-Jones – writer

Alma provides consultancy and writing and editing services for a variety of government and non-government organisations. As an instructional designer in a university, she worked directly with industry and business to develop programs in leadership and management, as well as training and assessment programs in technical fields such as medicine, engineering and science. For many years she was a policy analyst in the Victorian Government, and has written policy advice and speech materials for a number of Ministers.

Alma has collaborated with Chris Kotur on many projects and was able to observe and document the progress and outcomes of the Knox Community Panel. Alma captured the sentiment of the group each day in her summaries, as well as connecting with many of the Panel members.

Panel Discussions

Below is a summary of each of the Knox Community Panel sessions held from August to December 2016.

Day 1 – 27 August 2016

Knox City Council CEO Tony Doyle welcomed members of the Community Panel and outlined the importance of their work as part of Council's community engagement processes. He thanked them for their willingness to be involved and for contributing their thoughts and ideas on the priorities that matter to local communities, noting the vital importance of community input to the development of the City Plan (incorporating the Council Plan) for the next four years.

Broadly reflective of the demographic structure and range of localities across the City, the Panel quickly demonstrated their interest in knowing about the issues that matter to their community, and in representing the views, not only of themselves as individuals, but of other residents and ratepayers. In particular the need to consult and engage young people – those who will live with the consequences of decisions made in the present – was expressed, and Panel members shared the view that governments must learn to communicate with young people and take every opportunity to consult and involve them in planning and decision making processes.

Getting started

The Panel was provided with a high level overview of their City – its people, its earnings and economic activity profile, and its patterns of growth and change. The role of local government was then put in the broader context of Australia's three-tier system, and the many layered legislative frameworks that affect the way Council carries out its responsibilities and makes decisions. Members were given details of the scale of the City's assets, which must be managed for the benefit of the community, and the scope and nature of the expenses that must be met. The City's planning process was explained, from a focus on a Vision at the highest level, through the strategic and operational plans that are there to help achieve it, right through to the action plans that govern the work of individual departments on specific programs and initiatives. Community Panel members are being invited to have their say at a high level, helping to inform the thinking of Council as it sets priorities and considers how best to respond to new challenges. Panel members commented that the challenge is not only to plan well and implement well, but to make sure the community has a good understanding of what Council does and why. This session concluded with light-hearted participation in a Quiz on the City and its services, and some friendly competition between the Panel and Council staff.

Understanding the context

Panel members were then given a series of case studies that illustrate the context in which Council's planning must take place – some of the major challenges and possible opportunities for innovation. The case studies showed how programs and services can be affected by a changed policy, financial and operational environment. The need for local governments to decide whether a set of services or programs should continue in their present form, be replaced by others or be carried out in a different way presents a complex task. Panel members received insights into the choice Council has made in relation to the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme which has a market based approach for direct service provision. Council's decision has been that it will not become an NDIS direct service provider and compete with other NDIS providers. Instead

it will focus on its role in supporting people with disabilities to have access to good service options and access to a wide range of community opportunities in Knox. This will include working with the NDIS, the community and various competing service providers to ensure people will have access to the best fit for their individual needs and to link them into a range of community opportunities. This was an example of a response to a change in funding arrangements towards competitive arrangements.

Other challenges were also illustrated, with examples of changed levels of subsidy over time, resulting in a shift of the cost burden towards local government. The projected effects of the introduction of rate capping on Council's major source of revenue was also outlined, so that Panel members were able to gain a good understanding of the difficulties local governments face in ensuring that services and programs are sustainable. Again the Panel pointed to the need for the community to be fully informed.

Getting stuck in

Acknowledging that there is frequently no simple right or wrong decision, but that there is a need to make on-balance judgments that recognise the value of different services and programs, Panel members worked together in a prioritizing task. They discussed the value of the different areas of Council activity about which residents have been surveyed and shared their views informally. They also experienced something of the difficulties faced by Council in its consideration of where the funding emphasis should be, given that many services and programs are highly valued by the community, but current funding levels may be unsustainable. Panel members were also invited to think outside the square and to comment on any areas they considered important but not evident in the range of areas under discussion.

A 'voting' exercise, without any sense of final commitment, threw up some interesting areas of informal consensus, and was followed by a debrief where members could explain the thinking behind their preferences. Rated most highly by the group were Health, including mental health, and services in the area of Age and Disability, followed closely by Education (including education in the broader sense of life skills and job readiness training), and Employment. At the other end of the spectrum, members indicated a lack of support for investment in Arts and Culture. Panel members expressed interest in youth services and drug rehabilitation as areas of importance they would like to see discussed further.

During the debrief Panel members drew attention to the importance of working out the connections between different areas of activity and the underlying sources of social problems that can be addressed at a local level. For example, a member mentioned drawing connections between the areas he cared most about, and discovering that they tended to cluster around mental health and education. He suggested that if effort went into building the resilience and self-reliance of people through a focus on health and life skills education, many other services may not be so necessary.

Drilling down

At the end of Day 1 the Community Panel was thanked warmly for its contribution and for the valuable insights offered during the day. Day 2 will involve a deeper and more detailed look at key areas of activity and some consideration of what Council's role could be in them. Members will also hear the outcomes of other engagement activity and begin to gain a sense of the range of views across the community.

Day 2 – 10 September

Facilitator Chris Kotur welcomed Panel members back for a second day of working together, this time with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding of their Council, its responsibilities and the broad range of its activities and services. Asked to reflect a little on the outcomes of Day 1, members commented on the positive way in which this initiative is being received and the value of the media coverage achieved in the Knox Leader. Their friends and neighbours in the community have welcomed this engagement activity and other efforts by the Council, such as the pop-ups and focus groups, to be in touch with the community. In discussion members noted that no group can hope to fully understand the experience of people in all situations, and so must be careful to listen to the views of others and take as many perspectives as possible into account.

Confronting the future

The Panel was presented with some brief videos of the future, outlining the pace of change and the advent of technological change on a scale previously unimagined. The Panel noted that the timelines predicted by some observers are not very far away and that we must think about how needs may change and how solutions will have to change to meet them. The possible downside of major technological change was also discussed – particularly its potential to de-skill people and displace them from useful roles, and perhaps to compromise their individuality, privacy and personal independence.

What we've heard so far

Panel members were given an overview of the preliminary findings of other investigations into community needs and data indicating how well Knox is doing in comparison with the Melbourne metropolitan area and with other municipalities. The preliminary outcomes of the latest *State of Knox* report were presented in terms of major strengths – including health, community connectedness, personal and economic wellbeing, and the quality of the environment and the arts, culture, leisure and recreation that can be enjoyed in the City.

Areas of relative concern were also outlined, including emerging issues of substance abuse among young people, a perception of increased crime, a lower than average acceptance of cultural diversity. At the same time, the figures are trending in the right direction for the major health risks such as smoking, alcohol consumption, unhealthy food intake and lack of exercise and in some cases showing improvement well over the metropolitan average. Preliminary results of this year's Municipal Survey were also shared, providing data on what the community considers most important and how they feel about their City. The survey showed that in general people are very satisfied with Knox, in particular with its sport and recreation facilities, as well as the ease of getting around. There was some resonance between these findings and views expressed by Panel members in the process so far.

Understanding what Council does

Recognising that the role of Council is not always well understood, Panel members began to explore the range of ways Council can choose to deliver services to the community – everything from being a full service provider to stepping back and empowering others to deliver a service. Members recognised that it is sometimes more efficient for Council to fund other agencies to deliver, to partner with other Councils, governments or private providers to get something done, or to bring other groups together to manage a service.

The statutory roles of Council were also outlined, especially in planning and regulation. To illustrate the variety of roles and to give members insight into the complexity of decision-

making and prioritising in specific areas, Council staff with expert knowledge were on hand to give detailed briefings on service provision in four areas:

- economic development
- planning
- youth, leisure and cultural services
- sustainable infrastructure.

The role of Council in helping to start and grow businesses in Knox so that local jobs are available was discussed. Members heard about the contribution of this region to manufacturing and Australian export effort – a reminder of the importance of getting young people interested in the high technology workplaces that modern manufacturing now involves. Some members were surprised by the range of activities and communication channels provided to businesses.

Next, the Panel heard about the Council's statutory role as a planning authority and the many ways in which the planning function affects all aspects of community life, because it is concerned with balancing the need for development and change, against other equally important community needs. The importance of consultation, negotiation and information for the community was emphasised.

The range of services provided under the heading of Youth, Leisure and Cultural Services came as a surprise to some members, with examples of the major reach achieved by facilities such as Knox Leisureworks, the community involvement and connection achieved through cultural festivals, the value of services to young people, and the importance the community places on libraries. It became clear that this area of services is challenged not by a lack of interest by the community but by the opposite: growing participation means an increasing demand for high quality facilities, spaces and activities.

Finally, members received a valuable overview of the challenges involved in capital works, which involves both a renewal program to maintain and replace infrastructure as needed, and the development of new projects – buildings, facilities, roads and paths. The concept of the 'movement space' and the 'engagement space' helped explain how planners and urban designers work to make places where people will meet and talk to each other – a key aspect of a healthy community.

These sessions were packed with information and stimulated a good deal of discussion as members considered and commented on various aspects of the different roles of Council.

Towards Day 3

Members were again thanked for their commitment and the quality of their input to the process so far. After a break to allow for a caretaker period and the conduct of Council elections, the Panel will reconvene to undertake more detailed investigation of existing services and to contribute their ideas to the new City/Council plan for the next four years.

Day 3 – 5 November

Facilitator Chris Kotur welcomed Panel members to the third day of working together, after a long gap to allow for the conduct of Council elections and declaration of the poll. The aim for this third day was to gain greater understanding of the decision-making process and to grapple with some of the challenges of balancing consideration of the interests and concerns of current residents and ratepayers with those of the future community in a changing society.

Asked to reflect a little on the process so far members commented on a growing empathy with the difficulties local elected officials and Council officers face in dealing with complex issues in which different groups have an interest. In commenting on the recent election, Knox City's preference for attendance voting was noted (with postal and other options also available) and the relatively low profile the local elections appear to have in the community.

Some members were saddened by an apparent lack of engagement in the process of electing a new Council and considered this an untenable attitude if people want to be well governed and have a say in how their local community develops in the future. Members were interested to hear the outcomes of the election and are hopeful that Councillors will continue to be interested in direct input from this community engagement activity.

'Falcon Hills Park'

Panel members were then handed a challenging assignment. Working in small teams, they received a briefing on a fictional, but quite common, situation – a green reserve currently designated as an activity centre, set in the middle of an industrial area, and currently home to a cultural centre, sports facilities, a library and childcare centre and a youth activity centre, with open space used by football teams and others. As is the case in real life for many publicly owned and maintained facilities, several issues have arisen at the site, calling for responsible investment to maintain, upgrade, renew or replace ageing buildings and to ensure that the site itself is adequately drained to mitigate flood risk and risks to structural integrity.

With a number of competing aspects to be taken into account, members had to deal with some additional challenges along the way – a development proposal that tested their sense of what is appropriate development. They had to consider development that will serve not only the interests of those who may immediately benefit, but the interests of those who come after us, who will want to enjoy the open spaces we own, and who will appreciate our wisdom in preserving green areas for their wellbeing.

Even with the necessarily limited information that a one-day simulation exercise involves, members recognised that this decision-making process shared a great deal with the real-life issues that arise for the consideration of Council.

Making difficult decisions

In developing their ideas about what should happen on the site members sought to balance environmental concerns with the need for housing for those attracted to the area; the claims of current users against the potential benefits of new development, new opportunities for employment and improved future amenity; the value of current infrastructure and the role it plays in community life, against the potential value of a redeveloped site responsive to the needs of new residents.

Comparing the outcomes of their discussions, teams discovered that they were in agreement about the importance of open space; the value of designated areas for sport, including sporting areas adapted for use in girls' sport; the role of a public library as a place that offers services and access for all; the need for places that are accessible to as wide a range of people as possible; and equipment and facilities for fitness. They also agreed on height restriction as one indicator of appropriateness in development, preferring to negotiate solutions that would result in low- or mid-rise development, rather than high rise residential or community facilities.

Uniqueness was identified as one way of judging the importance of new development. Teams were not keen to see new facilities built where similar facilities already existed either nearby or in the region, preferring to pay attention to those facilities which are not so widely available. They also agreed on the need for negotiation, collaboration and joint venture, with users, developers and the Council all having a role to play in coming up with good solutions and carrying out projects.

Asked to outline what they relied on in their decision-making, and how they set about prioritising one solution over another, members spoke of the values that came into play. These included an overall concern for community stability and cohesion, and a commitment to accessibility and openness – spaces and facilities that will bring as many people as possible into contact with each other as equals in a safe, mutually respectful community. There was also the recognition that in any decision there needs to be concern for those who may lose a benefit they currently have or be excluded from access to a community-owned asset. Members spoke of the need to ensure access for people with a disability and to build this in as a requirement of any new project.

Good communication

Asked for advice on the best way of communicating decisions, members emphasised transparency, directness and honesty in all communications. They suggested that although it is impossible to make decisions that will be welcomed by all, it is possible to be open and honest in communicating those decisions, and in helping people see the problems that a decision is intended to address.

Towards Day 4

Following this session, described by some as 'serious brain work', members were again thanked for their commitment and the quality of their input to the process so far.

The Panel reconvenes in two weeks to consider in much more detail several areas of policy and service delivery, and to provide advice on prioritising within those specialist areas, as a way of continuing to contribute their ideas to the new Council's planning for the next four years.

Day 4 – 19 November

Facilitator Chris Kotur welcomed Panel members to the fourth day of the Community Panel process. The aim for this day was to build on the last day's exercise in decision-making by a more detailed look at Council's areas of activity and role, and to undertake the difficult task of beginning to prioritise them.

Asked to reflect on the decision-making processes of Day 3, members commented on how challenging and complex a process it was, trying to meet competing needs and find solutions that will offer the best outcome for the community. Others commented on the way the exercise had increased their awareness of the community and environment around them, and how it had led them to look around and think about the way buildings need to fit with the visual beauty of the area. In considering this, they also recognised that planning and development issues have a social and human dimension and that it is easy to be overprotective of the city as it is, at the expense of those who need housing. It was acknowledged that there are many aspects of community life over which local government does not exercise specific control; for example, the scale and demographic impact of immigration and other aspects of social and economic policy.

The next ten years

Panel members were then asked to work in groups, with the challenge of thinking about the City of Knox ten years on – what kind of improvements, features, services and facilities would they want to see in their city? There were many different ideas, but four areas were strongly represented in the views of all groups:

- *Community connections* - members emphasised the need for events, processes, places and opportunities that would bring people together, making sure there were opportunities for young and old, and people of different cultures to know each other, be together, and learn from each other.
- *Community infrastructure* - this was closely related to the first theme, but more focused on the built and natural environment. Members spoke about libraries, community hubs of different kinds, sporting facilities and 'all-engaging' places that will make it possible for people to be together and support each other.
- *Transport* - the need for an improved public transport system was a key part of Members' thinking, not just for the value of good transport in itself, but for the connection this has to issues of access and ease of movement for an ageing population. The need for the road system to be improved and maintained was also seen as important, and connected to issues of public safety.
- *Strong leadership* - this was seen as an essential part of a healthy community. Members referred not just to Councillors who would lead well and with integrity, but to leadership in the wider community as well. Good, open communication was seen as part of this aspect of community life.

Other themes were presented by members, with a good deal of support across the groups:

- *Safety* - including the need to make people feel safe, especially in areas they now identify as unsafe.
- *Health and community services* - with good access to hospitals and medical services that are affordable and that will help prevent social problems.
- *Sustainable environment* - with a concern for both the built and natural environment.

- *Inter-governmental relations* - recognising the importance of relationships with state and federal policy makers.
- *Planning* - understanding how important it is both to plan for future needs and to exercise care in managing growth for the city and its centres of activity.

The Role of Council

Following this, members continued to collaborate in groups, this time with a specialist perspective and with access to a Council officer able to listen, answer questions of fact, and interpret or explain any issues. The areas of specialism were Community and Culture, Development and Safety, and Sustainable Infrastructure and Environment. Groups were given detailed information on their areas, including human resources and budget allocations, as well as information on the current range of services and programs, generally based on Knox Council. Their task was to think again about the next ten years, bringing their own personal viewpoints to the task – their values, experience and aspirations – and also an informed perspective of their specialist area. The exercise required detailed attention to real-life decisions, understanding that all services have value, yet not all may be sustainable and priorities need to be set.

In considering not only the actions Council could take for the future but the role it should have, members drew on their knowledge of the range of ways in which Council can operate. Directly providing services in an area, with full responsibility for funding them and delivering them, is not the only role available. Council can advocate and influence, partner or form alliances with other agencies, provide funding to enable others to carry out delivery, educate individuals and groups in the community to enable them to carry out activity for themselves. Council can also support and shape the community through its planning and regulatory functions.

This work allowed members to talk in more detail about the areas they see as important for the city's future and to identify areas in which they thought Council should be the active provider, other areas where advocacy was more important, and those where partnering would make sense – areas in which other government or nongovernment agencies already have an important role. The question of having no role at all was also posed – were there any areas in which members thought that Council could withdraw from providing services? In response to this, some members questioned the role of Council in the provision of kindergartens and considered that this might be an area for which the state government should be responsible, as are primary and secondary education. There was also interest in co-location and rationalising of services, where there may be opportunities to gain efficiencies, such as combining school and public libraries or other similar resources. Good information and communication continued to be a topic of interest, with members suggesting various proactive steps Council could take to talk to and listen to rate payers and other residents.

Towards Day 5

The Panel reconvenes in two weeks for its closing session, in which it will finalise its contribution to Council's planning for the next four years.

Day 5 – 3 December

On the closing day of an engagement process that has spanned three months, the Panel members were welcomed by Jo Truman, Director, Corporate Development, who introduced the Mayor, Cr Darren Pearce and his wife Susan. Cr Pearce expressed appreciation to Community Panel members for their commitment, their willingness to undertake the task of considering difficult issues and complex information, and their dedication in foregoing time with their families to represent and serve their city. Cr Pearce assured the panel that its work will make a difference in the development of the four-year plan for the city, and indicated that Council is looking forward to a final report on the outcomes and to receiving a presentation by members of the Panel in the coming year. Panel members were each presented with a Certificate of Appreciation by Cr and Mrs Pearce.

Facilitator Chris Kotur outlined the aim of the final day as finalising the panel's thoughts and views, and gaining an insight into how their thinking has been incorporated in the planning process.

Reflections on Day 4

Asked to reflect on the prioritising outcomes of Day 4, members commented on areas that may merit more attention, notably mental health and ways in which the community can engage young men, in particular, and help them to access the support services they need. Members noted the role of community support groups in addressing mental health issues and the value of continuing to provide funding support to them.

The Panel also discussed the serious impact of rate capping on the Council's capacity to sustain its services and operations, and questioned the validity of the Consumer Price Index as a benchmark for determining the level of rate increase that local government bodies are able to impose.

It was suggested that it is unreasonable to expect Councils to maintain their services with inadequate funds and that the Municipal Association of Victoria's Cost Index is a much more realistic alternative.

Others mentioned that they have become much more aware of their surroundings over time, and more observant of the community around them.

Agreeing on priorities

Considering the outcomes of their earlier work, Panel members were asked to indicate the priority areas that they consider most important, and then the appropriate role of Council in supporting those priorities. The top six priorities that emerged from this process were:

- *Health and community services* - it was noted that Council has a role as an educator in this area, and a role in partnering with others to provide direct support to those who are drug dependent, and to provide direct relief to families affected by mental illness and drug dependency.
- *Safety* - the value of visible interventions to make all areas safer, such as better lighting and closed circuit TV surveillance, was emphasised. Again Council was seen as having a role in educating the community.
- *A sustainable environment* - again the role of educator was indicated, but specific measures to encourage sustainable building practices and hard waste management were also mentioned.

- *Transport* - in this area the panel saw the role of Council as advocate, especially in partnership with others, for extension of the existing rail network and for better linkage.
- *Strong leadership* - the Panel favoured processes of succession planning, engagement with youth and identification of leaders for the future, supporting their growth and participation.
- *Community connections* - the need to bring people together across potential barriers of culture, age and other differences, continued to be emphasised, as did the need to communicate effectively with the whole community so that all are aware of the services and opportunities that exist in the city.

In discussion members noted that their thinking had matured through the process and that they were better able to take the needs and values of others into account in considering what makes for a good community. Members also commented on the many connections that exist between different priority areas; for example, the contribution good Maternal and Child Health services make to identifying problems and helping to resolve them before they become serious, and the importance of employment opportunities for young people in creating a pathway to success and stability. Some saw a healthy community as an organic thing which needs to be fed and watered to grow, and for which local government has a role in addressing the root causes of problems.

A Community Plan for Knox

Members considered a set of draft goals under consideration for a new Community Plan and gave detailed feedback on the content and framing of these goals. These were generally well received and members were able to recognise common ground with their own thinking over the past sessions. Some suggestions for improvement included less emphasis on difference and diversity, and more on harmony, inclusion and what binds us all together; there was also approval of the use of practical measures and targets to ensure that goals are put into action and monitored over time. Panel members were also supportive of the potential name change from City Plan to Community Plan which they felt was more inclusive.

What does Knox mean to you?

Members were asked to identify key words that capture the meaning of their city. Among many suggestions, members spoke of a city that is green and clean, natural but evolving, safe, and inclusive. There was emphasis on the city's beauty, its semi-rural character, its closeness to natural bushland. Other key terms were lifestyle and opportunity, health, happiness and harmony. Members also mentioned a sense of community and a sense of belonging as highly valued aspects of living in Knox City.

Acknowledgments

Fleur Cousins, Manager Governance and Innovation, thanked the facilitator and acknowledged the team of Council officers who have administered and supported the process throughout. She thanked the Community Panel and expressed the hope that there will be future opportunities for similar processes of community engagement.

Evaluation

Knox Community Panel feedback

Community Panel members were asked to fill out a short questionnaire on both the first and last day of the community engagement project.

On the first day 24 people attended and answered questions about why they wanted to be involved, what they were hoping the Panel could achieve, how much they knew about Council and if they had been involved in any community engagement prior to the Community Panel.

There were 18 people in attendance at the fifth and final day of the Knox Community Panel. They were asked to complete an evaluation form asking about how the Panel was run, the information provided, their enjoyment, and what they gained from the process.

The full evaluation reports from Day 1 and Day 5 are attached as Appendix 1 and 2 respectively. It must be noted that when given the questionnaires, a lot of people ticked more than one answer in the multiple choice questions, therefore the numbers total more than the number of members of the Panel.

Why be part of the Knox Community Panel?

On the first day, many members said they were passionate about the community, appreciated the opportunity to be heard or were simply curious when asked why they agreed to be part of the Community Panel. However some also said they didn't really know what they were signing up for and eight people said that they needed the money.

By Day 5, almost all members said they enjoyed being part of the Panel, with some stating it was more difficult than they thought it would be. Not one person indicated they did not enjoy it and only stayed for the money.

What did the Community Panel achieve?

In the beginning of the process, most members were hoping that the Community Panel could influence Council's planning for the future, and that Council would understand what is really happening in the community.

When asked on the final day if the Panel met their expectations, most felt that it had, some stated they hadn't known what to expect in the first place, and other members described the way the Community Panel had far exceeded any expectations.

Personal gain

On Day 1, most Panel members stated they wanted to increase their knowledge about planning for the Knox community and about what Council does, have their say about the future of Knox, and some wanted to make connections with other community members.

When asked on Day 5 what they gained from the experience, most felt they had done all of the things they had hoped for in the beginning of the process.

Knowledge of Council

On Day 1, most people indicated they knew at least a little bit about Council, with only three people stating they knew nothing at all. By Day 5, most members indicated they

now know much more than they did and two people felt there is still a lot they don't know.

Reflections on the final day

When asked about the best part of the Community Panel, members indicated they enjoyed learning more about Council and learning about their community, hearing different points of view, gaining insights from Council speakers, sharing conversation and new ideas, meeting people, and feeling like they are making a difference.

According to most Panel members, there was little that could be improved in the way the Panel was conducted. However, some felt there could have been more diversity in the group, some felt there were individuals that dominated the discussions, some thought the Councillors should have been more engaged with the process, and some thought the information was a little difficult to understand.

On the other hand, many felt the Community Panel went well, with some indicating they wished the project could have continued on longer.

Overall, most of the members of the Knox Community Panel felt the information presented to them was interesting and they appreciated it being shared with them, they liked the way the group interacted and felt that they had the opportunity to be heard, and all liked the way Chris Kotur facilitated the sessions.

When asked if they would be interested in being involved in future community engagement activities and supporting Knox Council in its work, four people indicated they would rather not be involved. All others stated they would be interested in some form of community engagement, including surveys, focus groups, providing feedback on the Community Plan, being part of an advisory committee, volunteering or even becoming a councillor.

Conclusion

The Knox Community Panel provided a new engagement model for input into the develop of the new Community Plan for Knox. This model was seen as a best practice approach for deliberative community engagement and was well received by participants and their networks.

Over the course of the Knox Community Panel, members:

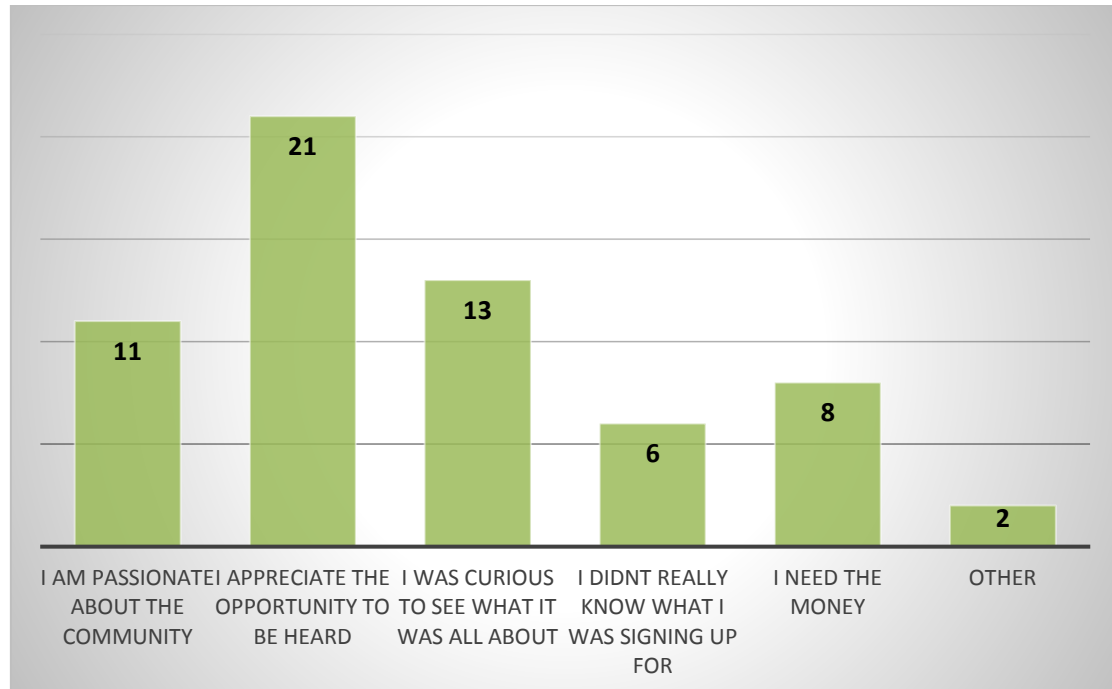
- spoke openly about their aspirations for the future of Knox;
- welcomed the depth of information provided and questioned officers on how things worked;
- openly debated and considered difference viewpoints when asked to provide feedback; and
- engaged with others between panel sessions to seek further views and ideas.

The Knox Community Panel has provided Council the opportunity to engage and have a dialogue with community members. This has led to greater awareness of the inter-connectivity between issues and the complexity of issues considered by Council. During the life of the Panel, members found an empathy towards the issues and decisions faced by Council and elected members.

Appendix 1 –Feedback Report (Day 1)

24 people in attendance at Day One of the Knox Community Panel

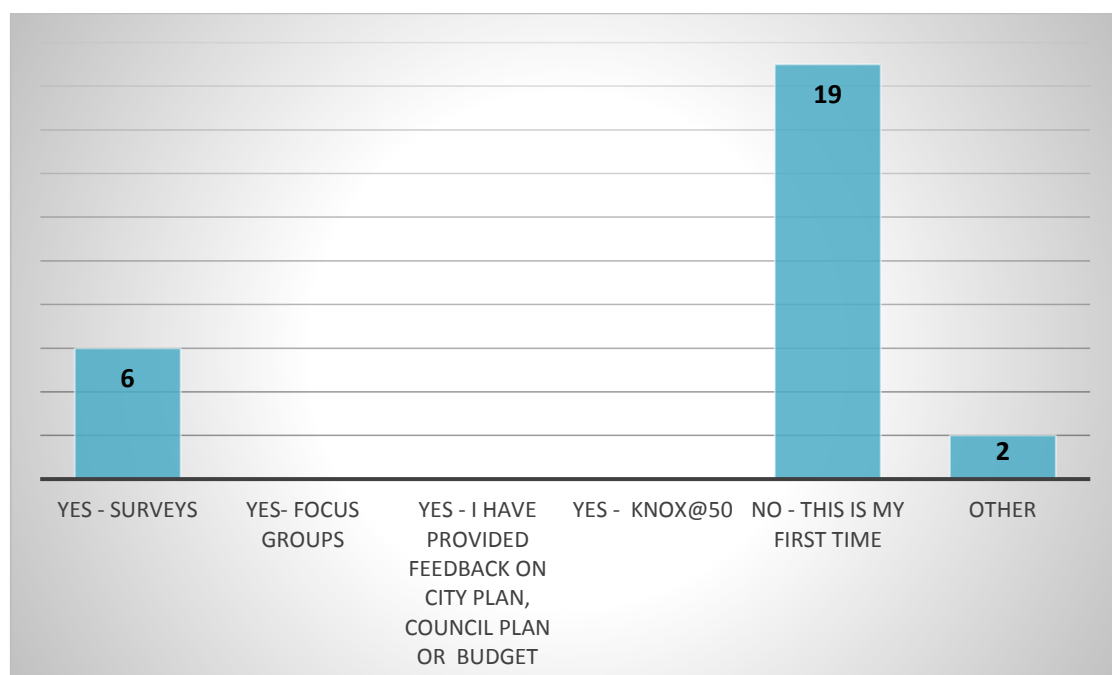
Q1 – Why did you want to be a part of the Knox Community Panel?



'Other' Comments –

- To be involved in a proactive way to help with the future of the Knox area
- It's a change of scenery to meet new people

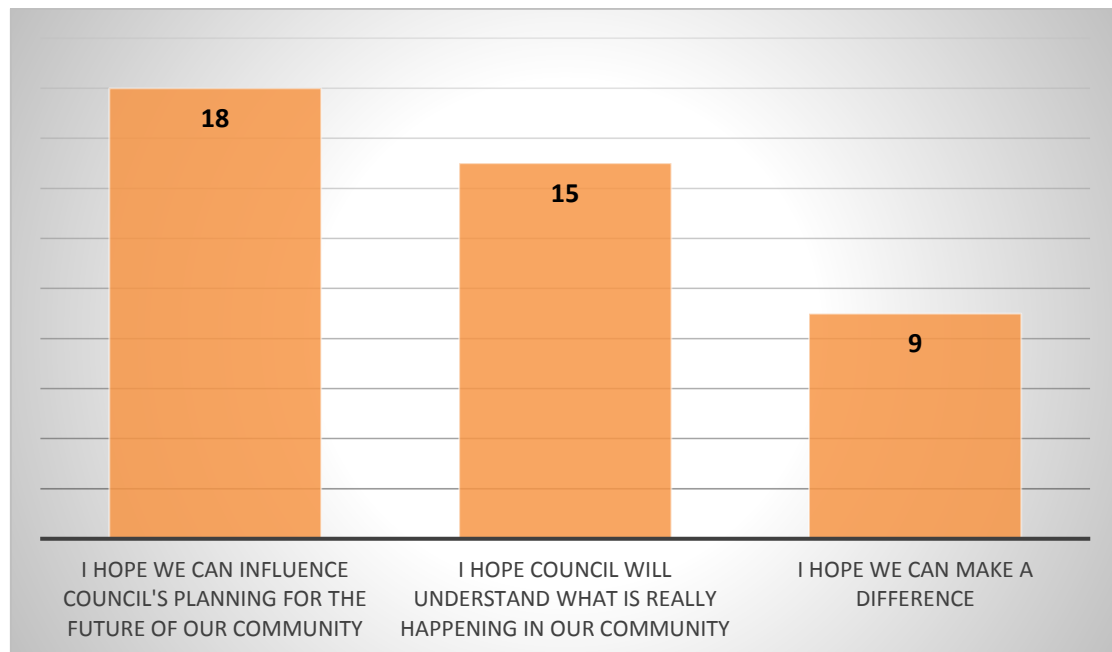
Q2 – Have you ever been involved in community engagement activity for Knox Council?



'Other' Comments –

- My first time in a 'group survey'
- Yes, about 15 years ago looking into when pre-schools might have to close or suspend sessions.

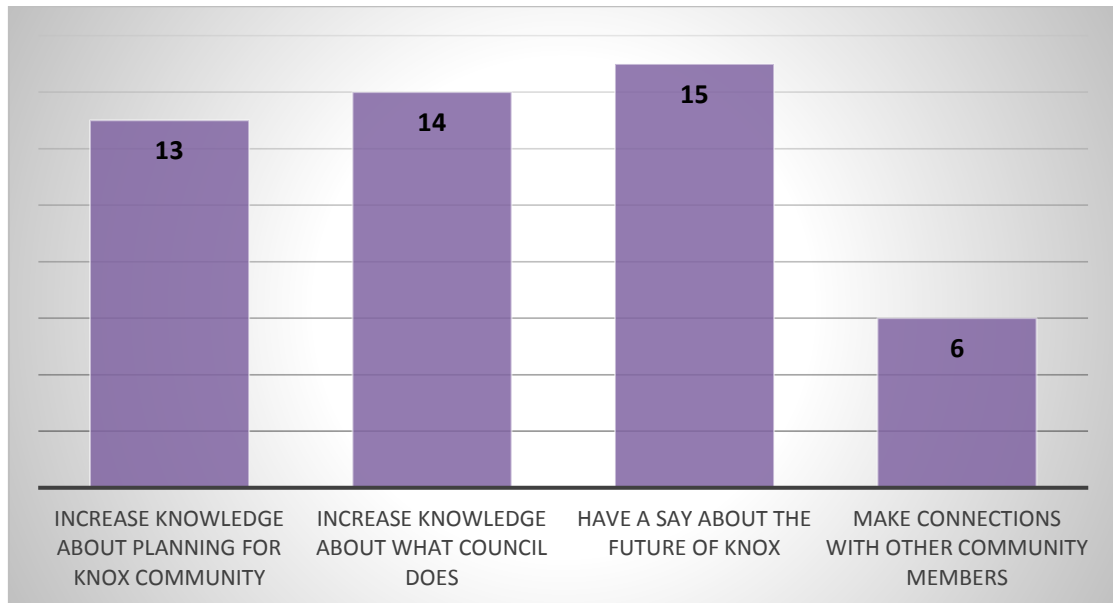
Q3 – What are you hoping the Knox Community Panel can achieve?



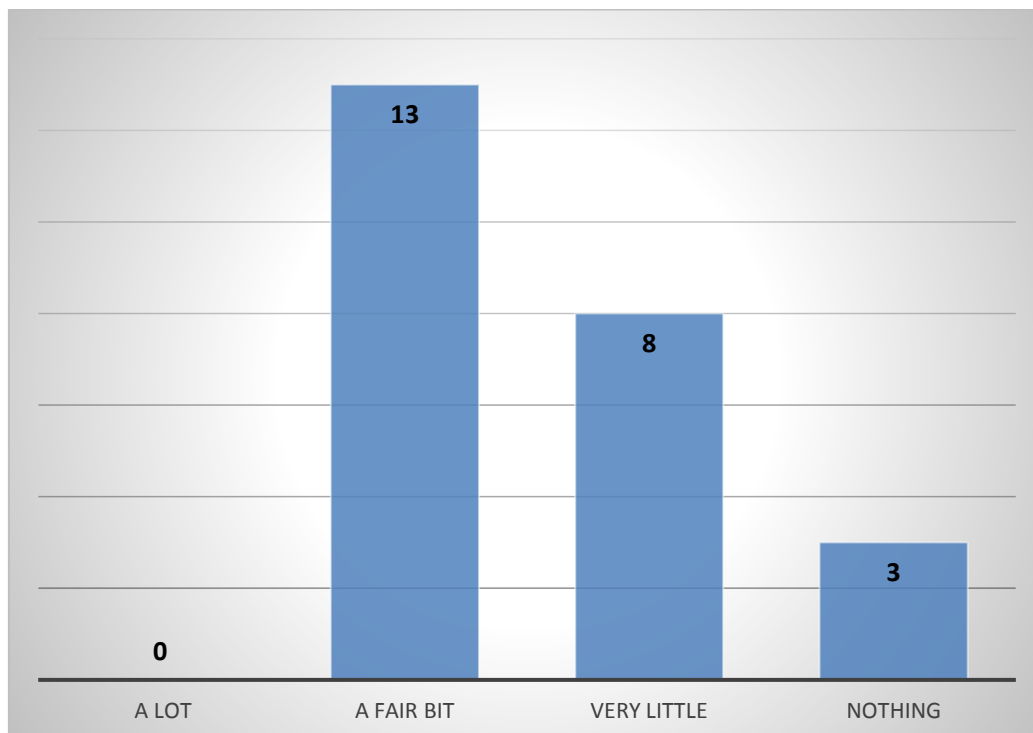
Make a difference is what way?

- Lower the gap between council & the working person- who are they? What do they do?
- To the lives of all those who reside in our community to provide support & care needed
- Hopefully help the Council indicate relevance to day to day life in Knox
- In the community education setting
- In providing a strong and connected way to involve the aged and youth in the community
- Everyone has something they can improve on
- I hope to make a positive difference for youth and minority groups and towards sustainability and animal welfare.

Q4 – What do you personally want to gain from this experience?



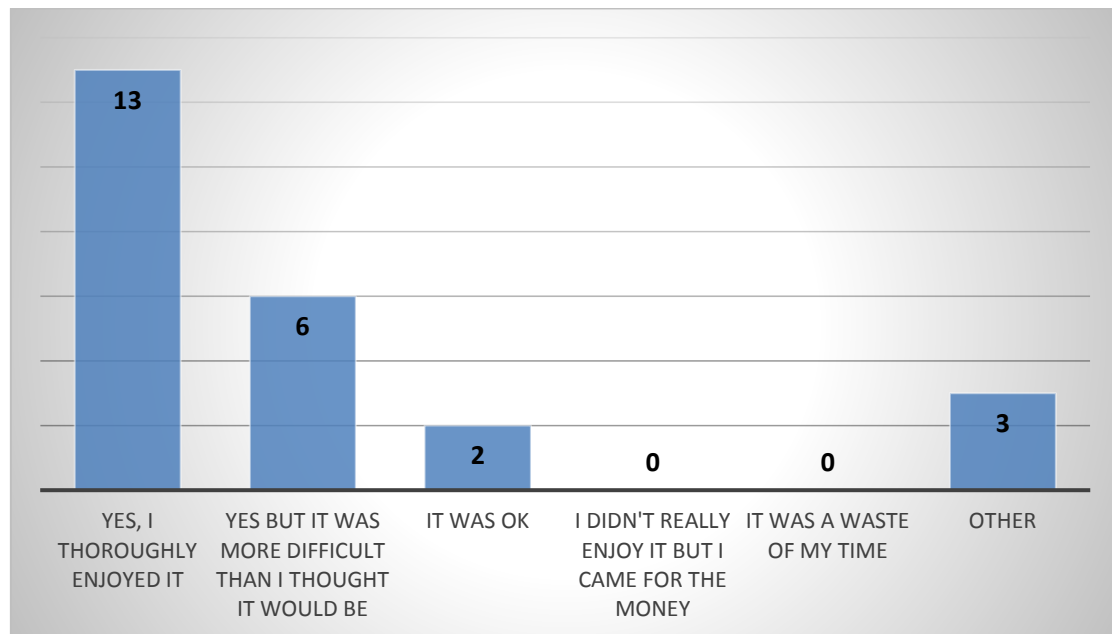
Q5 – How much do you know about what Council does?



Appendix 2 – Feedback Report (Day 5)

There were 18 people in attendance at the fifth and final day of the Knox Community Panel. They were asked to complete an evaluation form asking about how the Panel was run, the information provided, their enjoyment, and what they gained from the process.

Q1 – Have you enjoyed being a part of the Knox Community Panel?



'Other' Comments –

- It was ok – very good!
- I've lived in the area all my life and more than honored to be a part of the panel
- This has been an enriching, valuable experience. I have always been interested in how council evaluates the Knox priorities and financial restraints etc.

Q2 – What was the best bit about the Community Panel?

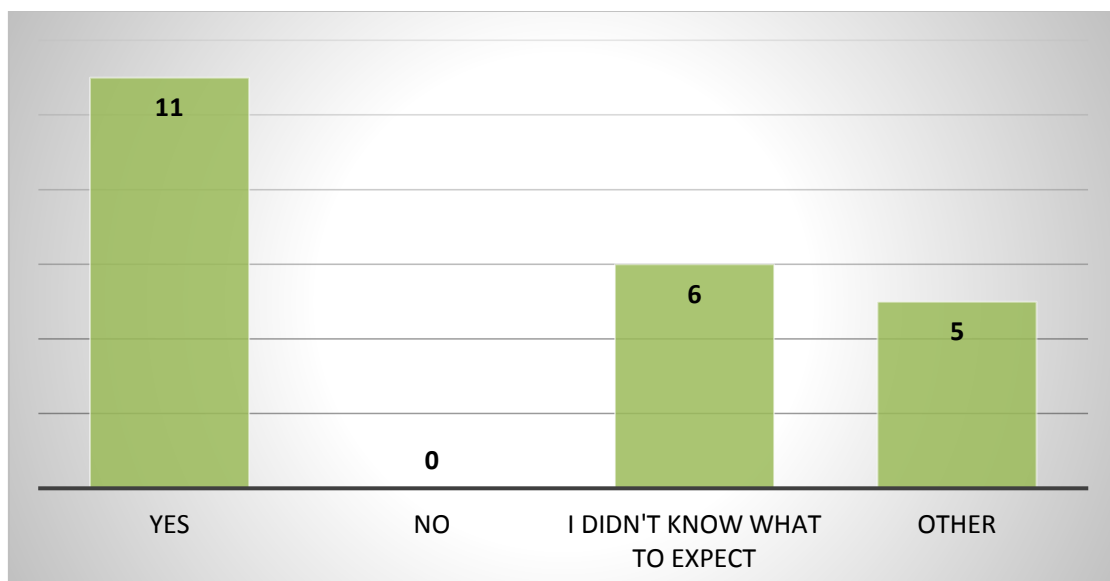
- Learning more about how council works and working with the other people on the panel
- Meeting new people
- The insight into the way that council is run and all the different factors that impact. It has been extremely valuable
- The best bit would be to listen to different points of view
- The fact that we learnt so many things about the place we live in and what the council is responsible for our community. Also it was nice to connect with other community members and learn from them
- Hearing diverse views – acceptance and accurate information about council operations
- Learning about how council works and knowing I am making a difference to the City of Knox
- Group session, everyone giving their view, bringing to attention things I would never have thought of
- Seeing myself grow and feel more connected to the Knox broader community and allow my eyes to be opened to new possibilities
- I learnt the vital importance of community unity
- Hearing other people's opinions and priorities
- Getting insights from other people

- Learning about the working of Council
- Community discussion and valuable insights from speakers
- Discussion, new ideas, seeing other people's views
- Being able to share views and opinions, learning more about what goes on behind the scenes of the Council. The food.
- Interaction with all the groups. Speakers. Learning the behind the Knox Council and their forward thinking

Q3 – What could have been done better?

- Worked well
- More diversity e.g. disabilities
- Too many individuals were allowed to dominate discussion, whilst sometimes needed but generally not required
- Some of the information we were given was a bit difficult to understand, it could have been less 'wordy'
- Not much – very professionally managed
- In my view there was a fair balance of every element and there seems to be no improvement required
- Perhaps a longer duration of the panel
- Engagement from councillors
- Thought it was all great
- Nothing – was very enjoyable
- Should have had at least a few councillors involved
- Nothing
- Less words in feedback
- I could do the continuation of sessions again – very engaging, nothing to be done better
- Have 2 Chris' – 1 was fantastic, 2 would be extraordinary
- Diversity
- I would have liked it to go a bit longer to spend more time on important issues

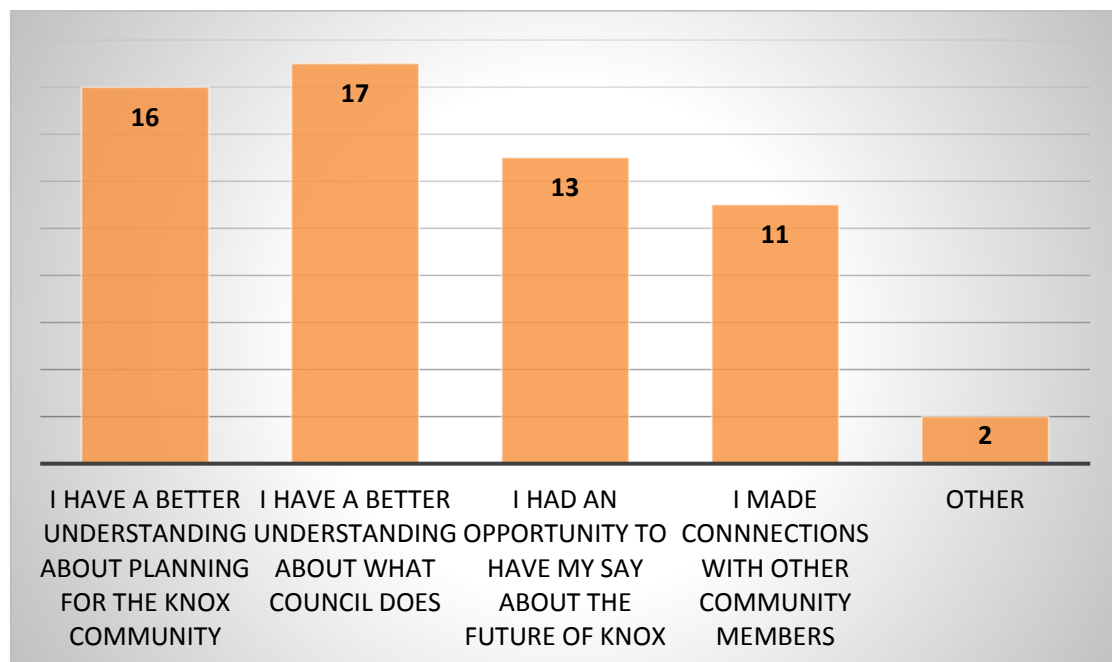
Q4 – Did the Knox Community Panel meet your expectations?



'Other' Comments –

- Probably exceeded them – very grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this wondrous journey
- Wonderful experience!
- I will only know this in the future – how the council react or run with our suggestions
- Above and beyond what I expected – I was pleasantly surprised
- I came in with no expectation other than the interest in surveys and panel discussions. Little did I know how much I would learn and enjoy the sessions

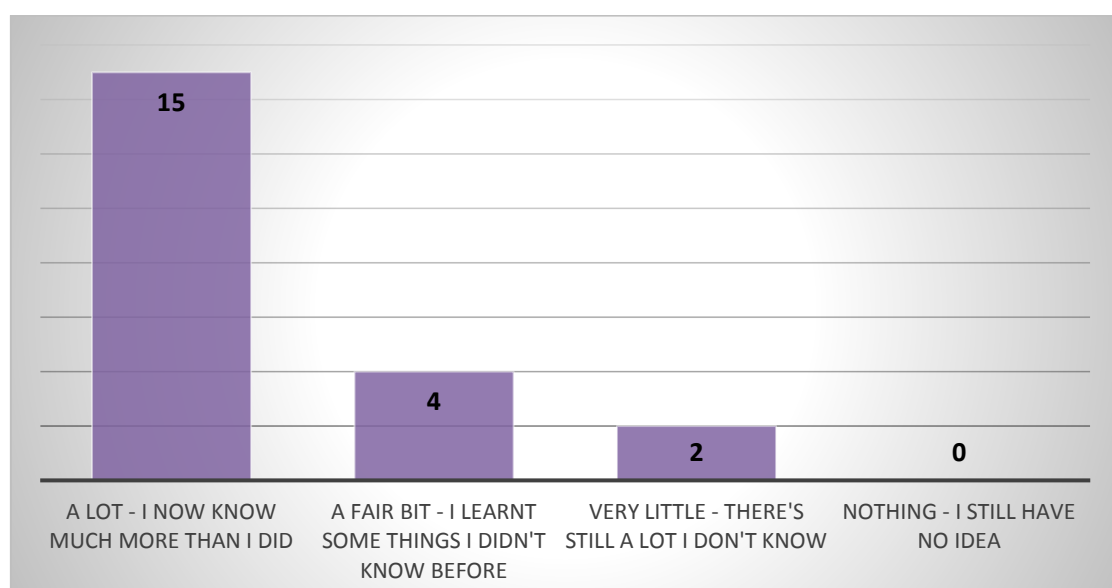
Q5 – What did you personally gain from the Community Panel experience?



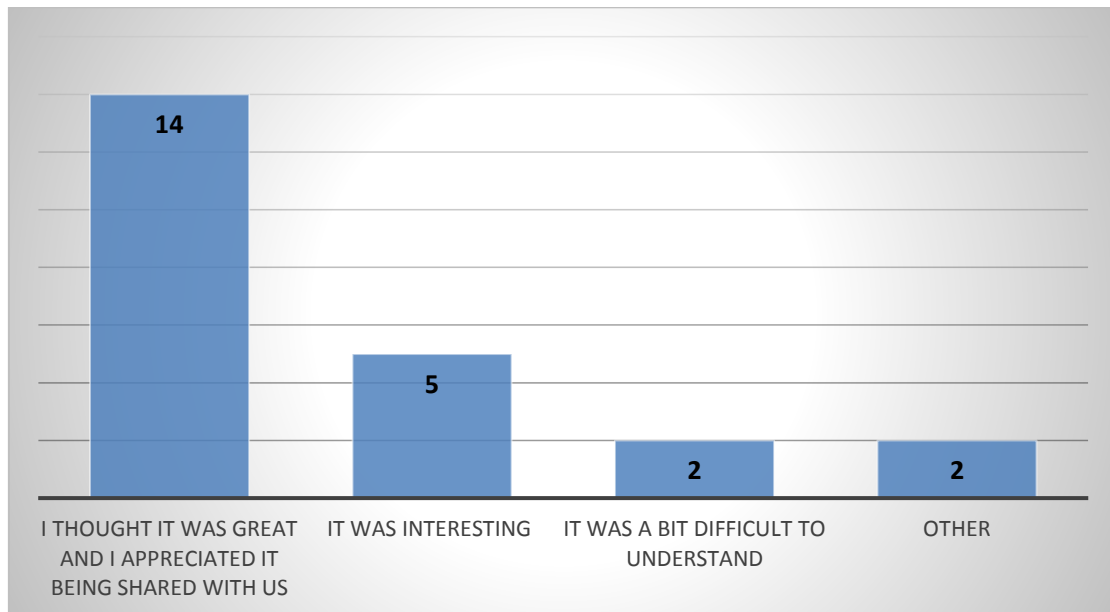
'Other' comments?

- Sense of belonging, new identity
- Knowledge that I do have a voice and it does make a difference

Q6 – Compared to Day 1, how much do you now know about what Council does?



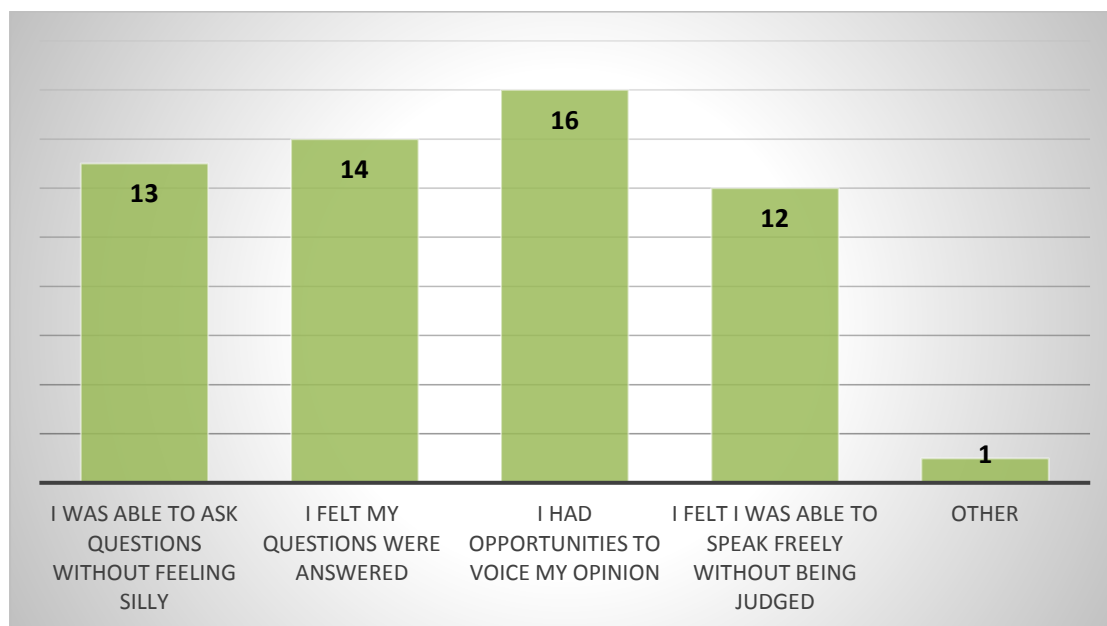
Q7 – What did you think about the information presented to you?



'Other' comments?

- I felt very privy to being provided access to information
- Challenging to get my head around at times

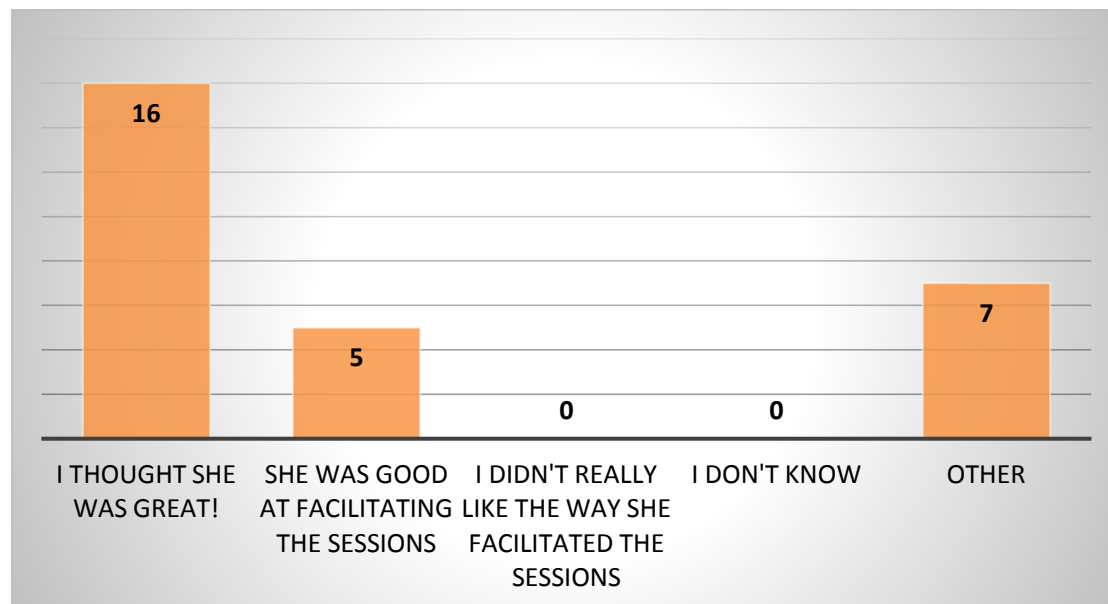
Q8 – What did you think about the way the group interacted?



'Other' comments?

- Definitely all of the above 😊

Q9 – How would you rate Chris Kotur, the Panel facilitator



'Other' comments?

- I thought she was great – without a doubt
- Excellent
- Extremely down to earth and professional
- Chris Kotur was fantastic with every session, very good
- Fantastic!
- Chris is awesome 😊
- I thought she was great – fantastic!

Q10 – Would you be interested in being involved in future community engagement activities and supporting Knox Council in its work?

