



2018 EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM - PROJECT GROUP 2

Rebranding Local Government in an ever changing environment

3197 words

Stephanie Papandrea, Sonya Jones, Justin Sexton, Christopher Watson,
Michael Moyle, Kahla Hooley, Carmine D'Amico

Executive summary

This report provides the opportunity to research options for Local Government to rebrand its identity in the ever-changing environment of South Australia, in particular over the next 5 years. Through recent publicity around the introduction of rate capping legislation in South Australia and the 2018 Local Government Elections, there has been an increased focus on Local Government services.

The project group developed a consultation strategy to engage all stakeholders, including a comprehensive survey provided to and completed by three stakeholder groups, community members, council contractors and Local Government staff.

Analysis of the 206 returned surveys resulted in a 'mock focus group' to discuss and review each of the stakeholder groups value in Local Government and narrow down possible options to better engage with the South Australian community and rebrand the sector as a whole.

The survey clearly identified that overall people are happy with the sector leading to the recommendation that more promotion on achievements and what the sector does will increase general community satisfaction. The research sought to uncover whether there is a need to move the perception of Local Government from just being 'roads, rates and rubbish' but data received has identified that the focusing on good delivery of the basic services first will improve the public opinion of the sector.

This report captures a snap shot of views and makes recommendations about how Councils may respond in future to improve the overall perception of their specific Council.

Table of Contents

Executive summary	1
List of Figures	3
Introduction	4
Background	5
Consultation.....	7
Analysis and Discussion.....	8
Survey Results	8
Service Value to your community.....	8
The view of Local Government in South Australia.....	10
The value of services Local Government provides	11
Elected Member Influence on Local Government Brand	12
Brand Concerns.....	13
Focus Group	14
Findings	17
General View of Local Government and its brand.....	17
Value of Service to Community and general services.....	17
Changes to elected body debate	17
Recommendations	18
Conclusion.....	19
References	20
Appendix A – Consultation strategy	21
Appendix B – Surveys, Results and Presentation.....	22
Surveys	22
Results.....	22
Presentation.....	22

List of Figures

Figure 1 - ELP Group discussions.....	6
Figure 2 – Survey Results	8
Figure 3– Survey ranking results (1-11)	9
Figure 4 - Image of LG Sector results	10
Figure 5 – Ranking of services.....	11
Figure 6 – Elective member engagement levels	12
Figure 7 – EM responsibilities	13
Figure 8 - Themes of response table.....	14
Figure 9 - Focus group result	15
Figure 10 - Focus group engagement feedback.....	16
Figure 11 - Recommendation Table.....	18

Introduction

This report seeks to answer the question of ‘what is the biggest opportunity facing Local Government in South Australia in the next 5 years?’

There has been an increased focus on Local Government in 2018 due to the Local Government elections and the proposed introduction of rate capping in South Australia. It was our project group’s assumption that there is a negative view of Local Government highlighted by this current political climate. Whilst many in the sector agree that these perceptions exist, this is mostly an assumption. To fully understand why this view may be true we will conduct an extensive research project, consulting with our key stakeholders. The findings will provide direction for councils on how best to explore the possible need for rebranding and what steps may need to be taken to change this perception of Local Government.

Through use of a consultation strategy, our aim is to capture a snap shot of views and make some recommendations about how Councils may respond in future to improve the overall perception of their specific Council.

Local Government is arguably the closest and most accessible level of government for the community, however there is often a misunderstanding about the role that councils play in modern society. We believe from our experiences within the sector, the common perception is that councils are present for the mundane tasks of “roads, rates and rubbish”.

Background

South Australian Councils have the same legislative powers and responsibility but there are significant differences between each. There are variations in geographic locations, population, financial resources and personnel resources. With a total area of 15,615,857Ha of area, some Councils have as little as 357Ha and others as much as 886,866Ha. This area covers a significant road network of 75,146kms of which some councils have as little as 36km and others a massive 3,891km of roads to maintain. Staff resources range from 13 to 785 FTE managing operating revenues of between \$3,654,000 and \$211,111,000 per year. No two Councils are the same (SA LG Grants Commission, 2018).

At the commencement of this project, the potential introduction of rate capping legislation into South Australia was a key discussion topic in State Parliament. This provided an opportunity for our group to reflect on the view of Local Government and the possibility to rebrand and promote what the sector does, what we achieve and what we have to offer to our communities. Rate capping has since been taken off the State Government agenda, however the opportunity to critically analyse the perception of Local Government is a valuable exercise this report explores.

The Elected body plays a crucial role in the engagement and involvement of the community. The perception of the elected body and their roles and responsibilities has a direct impact on the brand of Local Government.

Councils currently deliver a plethora of community services and infrastructure including libraries, community centres, open spaces, road construction, water infrastructure, waste collection, graffiti removal and water management. They do it for just 4% of the total taxes paid by South Australians (LGA, 2018)

Council rates are the only tax available to Local Government and these are set each year in consultation with local communities. Each year this process finds the balance to deliver the infrastructure and services that communities want and expects. This process is open, transparent and democratic with the community having real influence in where money is spent.

Local Government is concerned about increases to the cost of living and reducing the rate burden on its communities. Local Government are innovating to find efficiencies and additional sources of revenue to lessen cost to the community.

Preliminary discussions around the above lead our group to question if the community was aware of the actual percentage of tax revenue associated with Council services and if they were aware of the outcomes of their “rates” from their own local Council. Our group identified that rebranding Local Government is a huge opportunity for Councils within the next 5 years and most specifically rebranding and improving the overall perception of Council services.

To inform these discussions our group reviewed material produced by:

- Local Government Association in response to potential rate capping legislation
- Australia wide Local Government approaches to branding
- SA Local Government Grants Commission Database reports

(Daake, 2018; LGA, 2018; SA LG Grants Commission, 2018)



Figure 1 - ELP Group discussions

Consultation

Using the community engagement framework (Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate) a range of people from various demographics were consulted. The first stage was to conduct an online survey. These surveys were aimed to gain insight into current perceptions of the sector, and how we might;

- develop better customer service
- improve working relationships within council and with our key stakeholders
- brand Local Government

The survey posed a range of questions and was designed to gather qualitative and quantitative data. The survey was tailored to suit each of the stakeholder groups and where possible, the same content was used. We consulted with:

- The community
- Service delivery partners
- CEO's, Managers and colleagues

The Consultation strategy has been provided in **Appendix A** with a snapshot of online surveys used for consultation examples.

Analysis and Discussion

The survey produced some interesting results and challenged some of our groups assumptions discussed when initially creating the surveys. The responses were grouped into 10 themes, which are used throughout the rebrand process to inform what the community values.

Survey Results

Online surveys were posted from the 24 September to the 5 October 2018. Three individual surveys were sent to the target groups: CEO's, Managers and colleagues, the community and service delivery partners (contractors). The same questions were used where possible to create comparative data across the different stakeholder groups. This was not possible in all instances as some questions were not relevant to all parties.

206 responses were received and the break down was as follows:

Stakeholder groups	No.
CEO's, Managers and colleagues - 88.3% inside workforce, 2.1% outside workforce, 9.6 % management	145
The community	49
Contractors	12
Total	206

Figure 2 – Survey Results

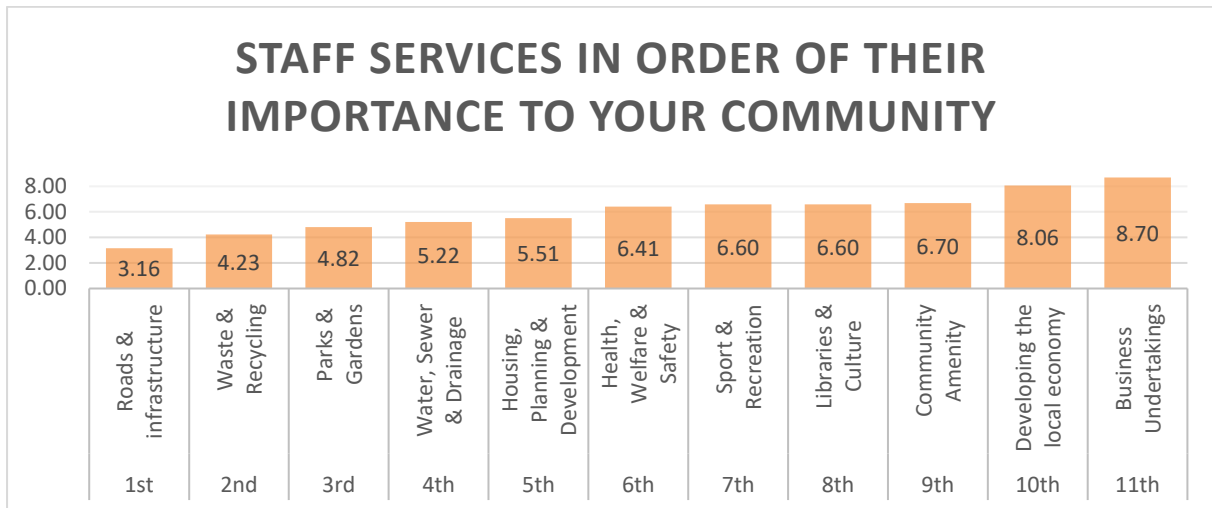
These results provided adequate qualitative and quantitative data to start to find out “what steps could be taken to change perception common community perception?”

Questions in the survey were tailored to questioning service priorities, overall service values, role of elected members etc. Survey results are provided in **Appendix B**.

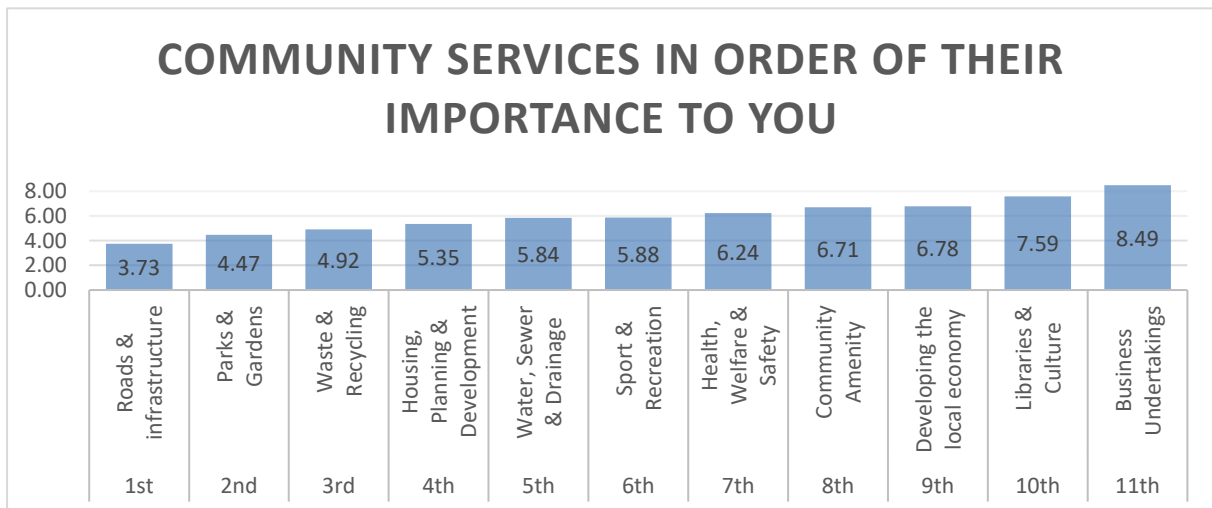
Service Value to your community

All 3-stakeholder groups were asked to rate Council services in order of their importance to their community.

Staff



Community



Contractors

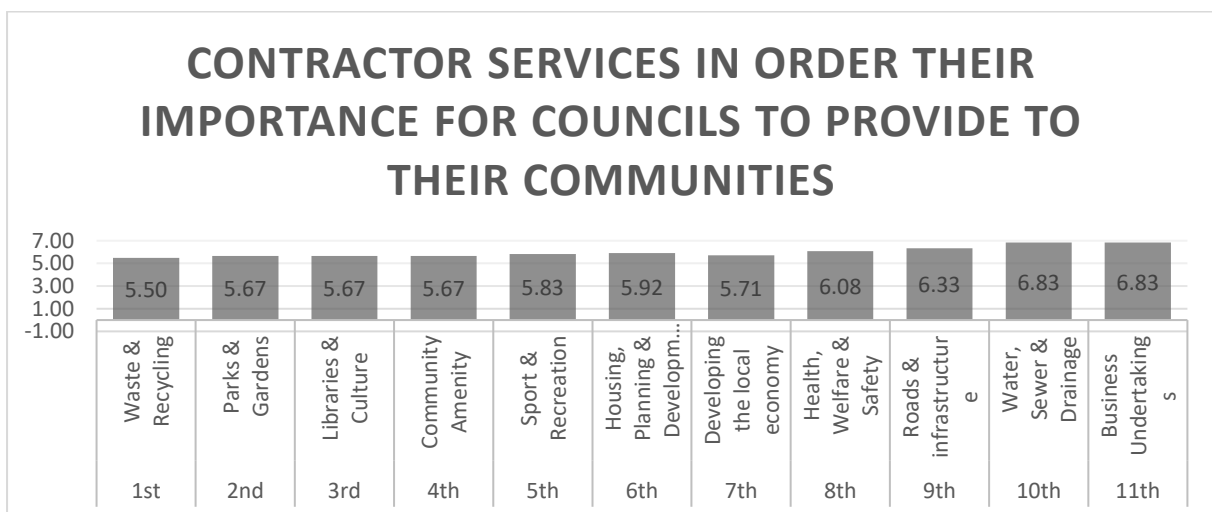


Figure 3– Survey ranking results (1-11)

The survey tools used (Google Forms) were limited and did not have a sliding scale function for this question. This meant the survey respondents had to rate service in preference 1-11 (1 being the most important) and were not able to give multiple services the same score. Feedback received was this was not an easy task to achieve as respondents valued many services equally, however this forced people to really consider the order of importance of services provided. Regardless of this, there were some recurring themes in the responses that inform the view of service Council provides.

The services identified as most important by the three stakeholder groups were very similar. Roads/infrastructure and waste/recycling were found to be of highest importance. All sectors found business undertakings to be of lowest importance. This could be interpreted that Councils should stick to community-based activities instead of trying to be competitive in the commercial arena. This could also be a result on the survey not clearly outlining what business undertaking could consist of. This presents the opportunity to clarify this question in a targeted focus group.

It was interesting to find that all staff with the exception of Directors/Executive Managers found roads/infrastructure to be of highest importance. Why was this? Does this reflect their core responsibilities as strategic thinker's vs operational?

The community responses found roads/infrastructure to be of highest importance except for the 35-49 age group who found the most important service is parks and gardens. It could be interpreted that this is because this age group is most likely to have children wanting to utilise these facilities.

Contractor responses were similar to staff and community, in that they believe business undertakings were of lowest importance.

The view of Local Government in South Australia

Survey participants were asked about their overall view of the Local Government image giving an answer between 1 and 10. The median results provided a positive response rating of 6.72 out of 10. The community perception was the poorest with the contractors giving the most positive response.

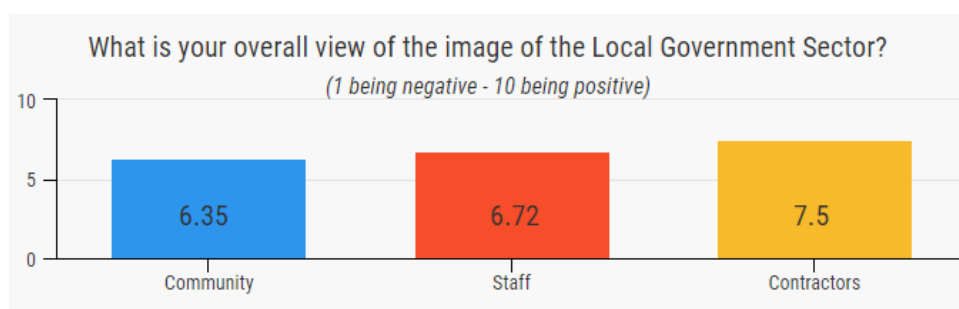


Figure 4 - Image of LG Sector results

66.6% of contractors rated their overall view of the sector as 8 or above. This could be interpreted as that they choose to work for Council and would not associate with an organisation that could be detrimental to their company image. In addition, it may reflect overall engaging with Local Government is productive and positive. On reflection, the survey findings could have been more qualitative if we had also consulted with contractors that currently do not engage with Local Government as their view may differ from those currently engaged.

The community response was generally positive with 87.8% of respondents rating the sector at 5 or above, and 34.7% said 8 or above. 12.2% rated 4 or below. On further investigation on these respondents, we found 6.1% were from a specific Council that has had considerable negative press. Whether this influenced the response is unknown.

Staff had a similar positive image of the sector with 84.8% scoring 5 or more. 65.5% scored 7 or above which is still a majority of respondents viewing Local Government in a positive way. Interestingly the outside workforce gave an average score of 8 out of 10. Results also showed that the longer the service of the individual the higher the average score.

Overall most people in general have a positive view of the sector.

The value of services Local Government provides

Respondents were asked to score the value of services between 1 and 10. The overall response scored as a median between 6.73 and 7.75 by each of the surveyed groups. The community perception of value for the services they receive was slightly lower than staff and contractors.

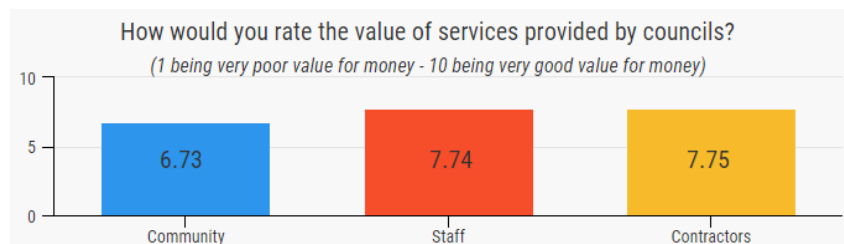


Figure 5 – Ranking of services

Community results show on average a medium level of satisfaction with services provided by Local Government for age demographics of 25-34 years and over 65 years. These demographics ranked services a 7 out of 10 on average. Middle aged demographics 35-64 years responded with a lesser satisfaction in value for service.

Staff and contractor results depict that on average they feel that the services Council provides deliver to a high level of service. 87% of staff and contractors gave an overall value of service score for 7 or higher. 30% of contractors scored a 10 for the service they believed they provided in partnership with the Local Government sector.

Overall, on average 50% of survey respondents gave a score between 7 and 8, this would suggest that most people in the community are satisfied with the services provided by Local Government. Staff and contractors believe the service the sector provides is slightly higher value than the local community.

Elected Member Influence on Local Government Brand

To further develop an understanding of our communities view on the elected body and their responsibilities, we posed two questions which if changes were made would influence branding. These questions were not deemed relevant for the contractor survey.

A first question around a general level of engagement responsibly and upskilling was included and the results were quite polarising.

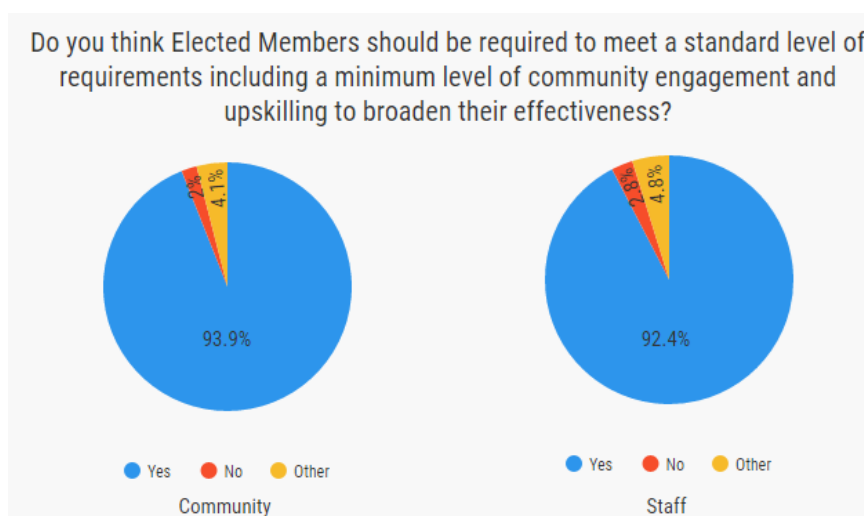


Figure 6 – Elective member engagement levels

There was a strong indication from staff and the community that Elected Members should have a minimum level of engagement and responsibility to upskill their effectiveness for decision making once elected. It was noted that four out of five CEO's agreed that this should not be required.

Upon further scrutinising of the survey results, it was evident that the opportunity to represent your community should be open to everyone. More extensive training for Elected Members once elected would support this.

A second question was posed around portfolio delegation to consider the delegation of responsibility for the Elected Body in Local Government compared to State and Federal Government.

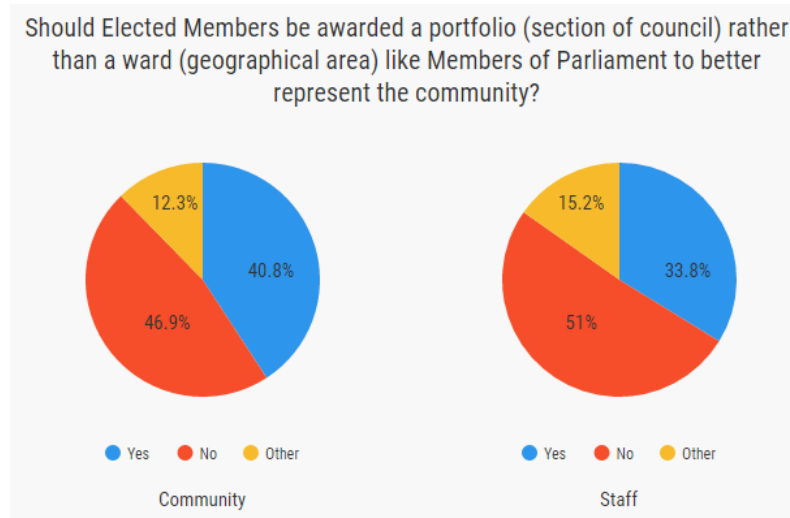


Figure 7 – EM responsibilities

Currently Local Government Elected Members represent a ward (a defined geographic zone) where State and Federal Government are given a portfolio of areas to look after.

The survey results leaned towards Elected Members (EMs) still being responsible for a ward in both the staff and community results.

Brand Concerns

The question “Is your Councils/the Local Governments brand a concern for your Council? If so are you/they working on ways to better represent your Councils strengths to the community?” was included in the survey. The results heavily differed between the community and staff with the staff results closer mirroring our initial group assumptions, these verbatim comments can be found in the survey results in **appendix B**.

This information and subsequent question “What initiatives would you use to better represent your brand to the community?” was used as the basis of a focus group to see where Council could start changing the conversation with communities.

Focus Group

The survey responses were grouped into Service Delivery Themes (SDT's). The 10 service delivery themes selected covered the broad range of services Council provides.

 <p>Customer Service Communication</p>	 <p>Infrastructure</p>	 <p>Business Support</p>
 <p>Community Collaboration</p>	 <p>Recreation Opportunities</p>	 <p>City Vision – Development</p>
 <p>Operating Maintenance</p>	 <p>Increased Service</p>	 <p>Events</p>
 <p>Public Safety</p>		

Figure 8 - Themes of response table

Our group conducted a mock focus group where six demographic scenarios were created.

Demographic personalities assumed were:

- A single parent with a child under 5 years of age
- A couple with 2-3 children and a dog
- Young professionals 25-35 currently renting
- A retiree couple paid off mortgage with 3 grand children
- A young couple planning a family and purchasing a home
- A student at University 18-25



The SDTs were then used to inform a focus group discussion to further explore what is meaningful for the community and individuals. Demographic personalities assumed by the group then workshopped the survey responses to:

- *"How do you think Local Government can raise the opinion of the services your Council and the sector provides?"*
- *How would you steer the view away from rates, roads and rubbish to better reflect the true value of the services provided by your council?"*

Each demographic scenario was given six opportunities to select a comment from the survey that they agree with or felt relevant. This was completed by six individuals from our group resulting in 36 different points of view.

The focus group responses did not include Increased Service, Public Safety, Business Support or Operating Maintenance. This could be interpreted that the majority do not regard focusing in this area will cut through and raise the opinion of Council services.

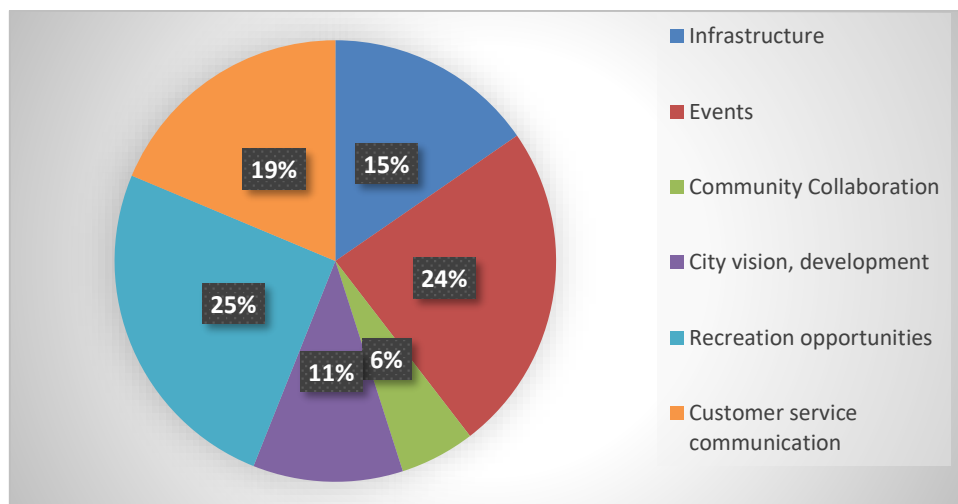


Figure 9 - Focus group result

The focus group participants were asked

- “Which of these actions would engage you?”
- Which of these services do you value more?”

The results from this process again challenged some of the ELP group assumptions when scoping the project. There was strong response to Recreation, Events and Customer Services. Infrastructure also invoked a strong response the 4th most popular.

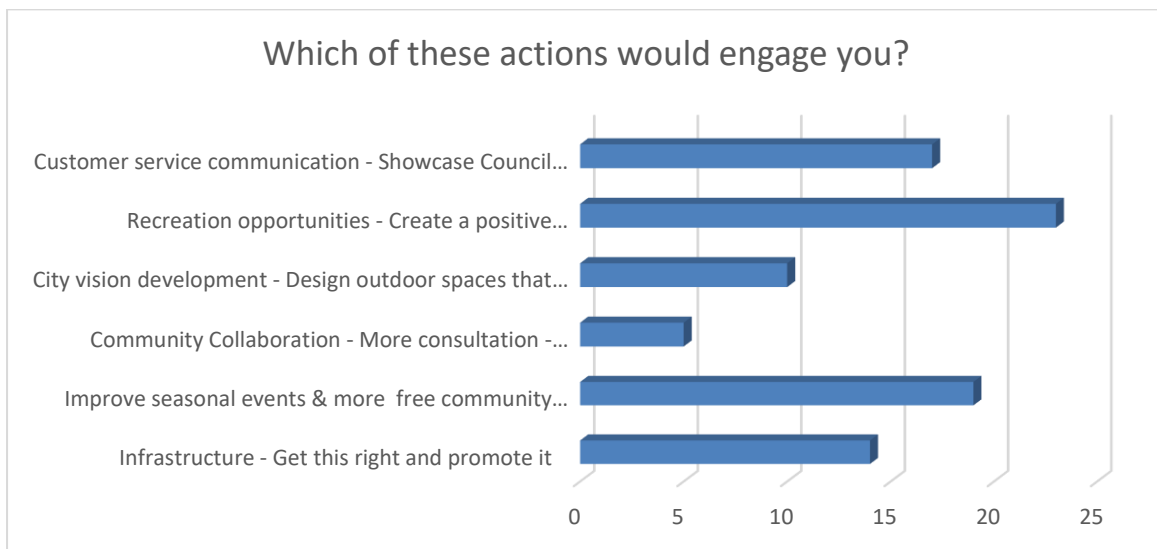


Figure 10 - Focus group engagement feedback

Findings

Overall most people's perception and thoughts on the sector was slightly more positive than expected.

Initially our project group's assumption was there is broadly a negative view of Local Government highlighted by this current political climate. The group expected a more negative perception of the sector given past experiences working in the local industry. The survey results do not show this.

The group has reflected on our negative bias, which may be a result of working front line with the many issues raised in the sector. Staffs perception may be skewed by the problem solving nature of our roles.

There was a clear note in the surveys that people are happy with the sector but more promotion on achievements and what the sector does will increase satisfaction of the general community.

The following findings and above survey results can be used by councils to undertake further consultation with their community. This can identify priorities and opportunities to improve individual council brand.

General View of Local Government and its brand

1. Overall, no concern as people only look at Local Government when there is an issue and otherwise are not too fussed.
2. Run focus groups with the wider community that identify their priorities for Public Safety, Business Support or Operating Maintenance.

Value of Service to Community and general services

1. More promotion at events for what Council is doing and showcasing what Council has recently achieved.
2. Some discrepancy in what Community values Council is responsible for and what CEO's and Senior Managers value Council should be responsible for.
3. Priority of Services, Infrastructure is the overall community's focus for the sector.

Changes to elected body debate

The disadvantage for encouraging EMs to be responsible for a portfolio may indicate that they will not be across general issues in the community. Staff must play an advising role to provide the correct technical information for EM's to make decisions in line with overall policies. It could be interpreted that EMs need to be representing community in their wards and representing general issues relevant to the whole community, not just a specific portfolio. Introducing EMs to a specific portfolio may also remove the responsibilities for staff to advise and make technical decisions to ensure Council continues to operate in line with its policies and procedures.

Recommendations

Based on the findings we workshopped 6 recommendations for improving the brand of local government.

1. If you have not already, adopt a communication and marketing approach for your council/department/team.
2. Get your teams involved and collaborating with each other. We are all responsible for engaging with the community, and the best ideas may not necessarily come from your department.
3. Explore promotional opportunities for events spearheaded by other departments. Ask the question, could your team have a presence at another team’s event to engage with the public and promote what you are doing?
4. Use the annual business plan to ask the community how we can best communicate with them.
5. Review your customer request system and online presence. Ask yourselves if your request system is setting you up for fail? Is your online presence customer friendly? Are they workable for the customer and your staff?
6. And finally, after you’ve implemented these steps, review your customer satisfaction levels again.

Ultimately, it comes down to bragging rights. Promote what you are doing and tell your community what achievements you are celebrating.

Recommendations	Example
Adopt a communication a marketing approach for your Council brand	Community engagement that promotes Local governments accessibility
Create an engagement group represented with staff from all services areas to explore opportunities for engagement	To include representatives from community groups/residents’ associations/essential services specific to that Council area. i.e. Infrastructure Corporate Community
Explore cross event promotion opportunities – are there existing events teams could attend to engage the community	Customer service teams/ duty planner etc. available to take requests at events. Pop up customer service facility to be taken to community events (Bring the civic centre to the field)
Use annual summary business plan to ask the community how we can communicate better	Provide this in both mail and digital formats
Review the online request system for email and web contact	Allow easy accessibility for customers to lodge customer requests online
Review community perception	Provide this in both mail and digital formats.

Figure 11 - Recommendation Table

Conclusion

There is an increased focus on Local Government in 2018 from marketing of Local Government elections and discussions around rate capping reform in South Australia. Consultation has captured a broad range at a high level and Councils now have an opportunity to use sector wide consultation data to undertake discussion with their local community on the perception of their Council.

Local Government is arguably the closest and most accessible level of government for the community, however there is often a misunderstanding about the role that councils play in modern society. The survey clearly identified that overall people are happy with the sector but more promotion on achievements, and what the sector does will increase general community satisfaction.

The research sought to uncover whether there is a need to move the perception of Local Government from just being 'roads, rates and rubbish' however data received has identified that the focusing on good delivery of the basic services first will improve the public opinion of the sector.

References

Daake (2018) 10 Crucial questions to ask before rebranding. Daake – where brands come true. Downloaded on 12 July 2018 at https://daake.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/DAAKE_10QsRebranding_eBook.pdf

LGA (2017) LGA 2018 State Election Agenda South Australia. Uncapped Potential. Local Government Association of South Australia. Downloaded on 13 July 2018 at https://www.lga.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/2017_LGA_StateElection_Platform_V7.pdf

South Australian Local Government Grants Commission (2018) SA Local Government Grants Commission Database Reports 2016-17. Government of South Australia, Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure. Downloaded on 26 November 2018 at https://www.dpti.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/484913/Database_Reports_2016-17.pdf

Appendix A – Consultation strategy

Our communities are the driving force behind services councils provide that they are not legislated to provide. For our group to understand the community's awareness of Local Government, we must consult with all stakeholders; the wider community, Council staff, senior management and service delivery partners.

The consultation stages include:

1. Online survey
2. Review survey results into themes
3. Conduct focus groups exploring the themes raised in the surveys

Consultation Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this Consultation strategy is to articulate the process and measures that will be undertaken to ensure our community, stakeholders, Staff and Elected Members can provide feedback on their knowledge and experience with overall Council perception and value of services.

Objectives

The objectives of this Community Engagement Approach are to ensure:

- Community, staff and contractors have easy access to the survey.
- Community, staff and contractors have are given opportunities to provide feedback.
- That information is provided to survey respondents is easy to read and simple to communicate across

Results from Consultation will be at a broad high level across all Councils. Individual Councils can then use these results to undertake further consultation with their communities to understand how these themes match to their specific areas.

Appendix B – Surveys, Results and Presentation

Surveys

Community members - <https://goo.gl/ayN3Me>

CEOs, EMs, Managers and staff – <https://goo.gl/wXLmNY>

Contractor, consultant or service delivery partner – <https://goo.gl/W8mqKU>

Results

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=112uhxevRyzwQz3qEk6CuSx-MPfESzUod>

Presentation

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1K6ahsg3Z_tXNIsrxfEe0kukzHRhrD91C