



Who do we trust in times of uncertainty?

I recently interviewed Rebecca Ryan, the General Manager of Blayney Shire Council, and we talked about leadership in times of uncertainty. Rebecca's recipe is to show leadership by staying calm in times of uncertainty, speaking with people, not just sending information out and talking with staff a lot, and with the community as much as possible.

So, I wondered who we do trust in times of uncertainty?

Research into local government in NSW in 2017 showed that trust in local government is higher than in State government, with 70% of those questioned trusting local government and only 43% trusting State Government. Earlier research had shown that local government was also trusted more than Federal Government, with the NSW Government the least trusted tier of government in NSW.

I wonder how that will have changed after the current crisis is over? Certainly, there seems to be a lack of trust in our Prime Minister and concern over mixed messages. There is also criticism of the NSW Premier over allowing passengers from cruise ships to disembark in Sydney and disperse without being checked!

With three tiers of government sometimes leadership is about staying out of it and letting others lead!

It takes years to build trust and only a few moments to destroy it.

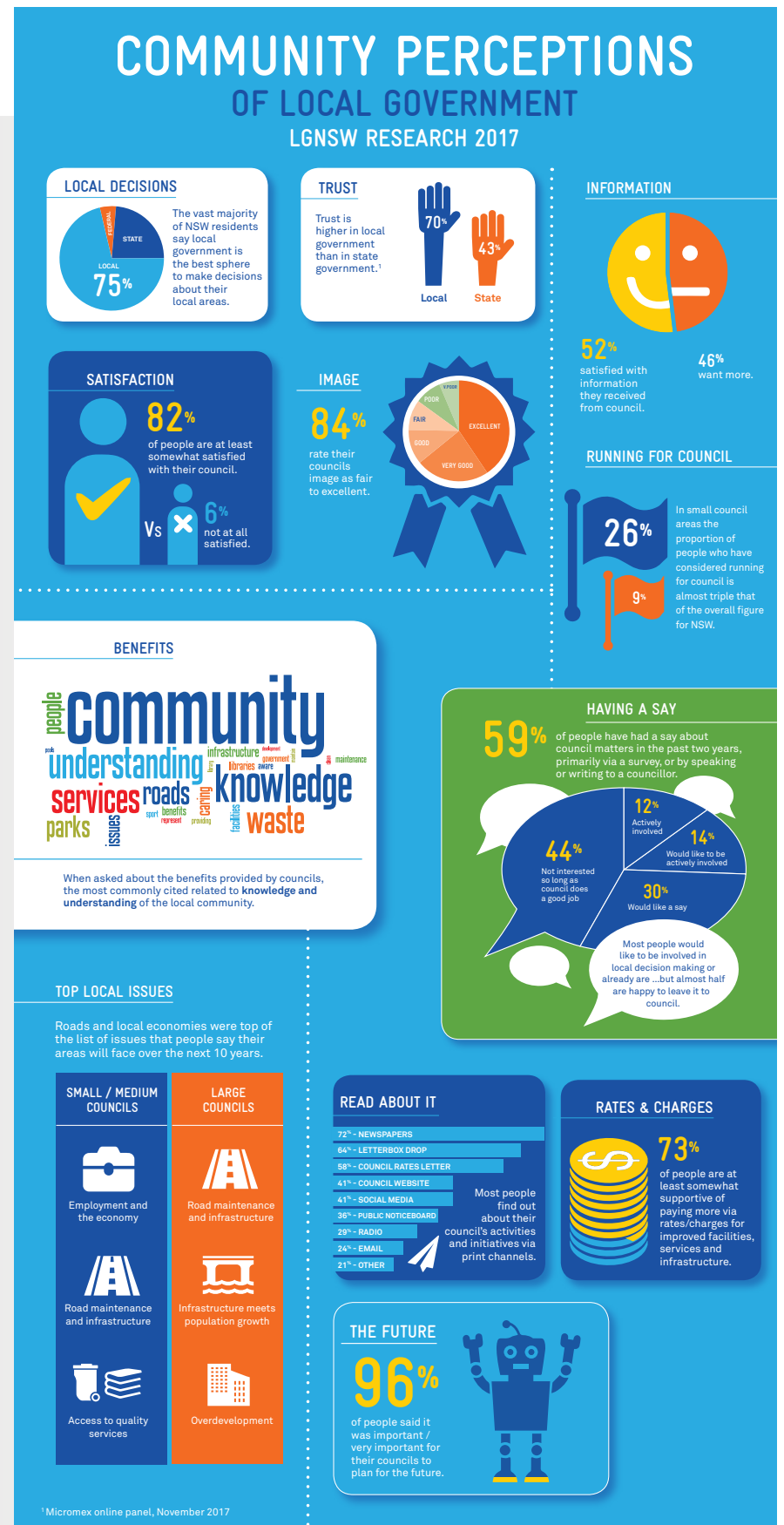
It has been interesting to watch the leadership from local government in Southern NSW following the bush fires. The Mayor and General Manager of

Bega Valley Shire Council, in particular, have shown great community leadership throughout the recent devastation and leading the recovery, and council staff were on the ground helping people throughout the crisis. The 2020 bushfires follow the devastating Tathra bushfires of 2018. One of the previous achievements was attracting cruise ships to dock at Eden, which was a major economic boost to an economy devastated by bushfires, but that has now been affected by the Coronavirus. The Council is both leading and continuing business as usual as much as possible.

I have written before about Community Satisfaction Surveys and the importance of trust between a community and its council. The top issues that tend to drive community satisfaction include:

- Reporting to the community on Council activities, services and facilities
- Transparent and accountable Council activities
- Council's financial management
- Condition and maintenance of sporting fields, parks and gardens
- Quality of new development, and
- Opportunities to participate in Council decision making.

The summarised research shows that *'there was a correlation between information provision/communication and satisfaction with local government'* and *'residents don't necessarily want to get involved in local decision making if they feel their councils are performing well and their interests are being well represented'*.



Some Key Findings



DECISION MAKING. 75% of NSW residents believe local government is the best sphere of government to make decisions about their local areas, compared with 27% who believed decisions were best made by state government and 5% who believed they were best made by federal government.



SATISFACTION. 82% expressed a degree of satisfaction with their local council (from 'somewhat satisfied' to 'very satisfied'). Only 6% were not at all satisfied with their council's performance.



BENEFITS. When asked what benefits local government provides to the community the most common answer (unprompted) was 'knowledge/understanding of the local community'.



HAVING A SAY. Almost one-third (30%) of respondents would like to have a say in council decision-making, 14% said they'd like to be actively involved - slightly more than the 12% who said they were already involved. Some 44% said they did not wish to be involved as long as their council was doing a good job.



INVOLVEMENT. 9% of respondents said they had considered or were likely to consider running for council, but in small council areas the proportion was almost triple (26%).



INFORMATION. Just over half (52%) of people were satisfied with information they received from council, with 46% eager for more.

I have received feedback that many people find these columns informative and I am happy to receive comments from readers about this column and other issues you would like me to cover so please either contact me at Orange City Life or aes@amandaspaldingconsulting.com