

2021 Council candidates' affordable rental housing survey

Independent reporting by Suyash Sharma
with oversight by Michele Adair, CEO

Reported August 2022



Survey purpose and context

Housing Trust is committed to increasing the supply of affordable rental housing through proactive, collaborative partnerships with the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Councils and local stakeholders. Numerous studies document the social, economic, health and wellbeing, workforce and productivity benefits that will result. This survey was designed to support the work of the Councils by providing insight into the knowledge and priorities of incoming Councillors. Prior to the election Housing Trust issued a Scorecard on each Council's performance in the preceding years. Kiama received an (F), Shellharbour and Wollongong (D), and Shoalhaven a (B), refer Appendix A. Publication of this data was timed to allow the Councillors to settle into their roles. The results provide a baseline for assessing the progress that will be made in this term in office.

One in three Australian households currently rent and the Federal Government forecasts this number will continue to increase as home ownership rates decline. Market analysts consider a 3% residential rental vacancy rate indicates an effective balance of local supply and demand. At the time of the Council elections on 4 December 2021 rental vacancies in the region had already fallen below 1%. By June 2022 the vacancy rate was around 0.3% and rents had increased by up to 30% (\$100+ pw) in two years (CoreLogic). Anglicare's March 2022 Annual Affordable Housing Snapshot found there were no properties affordable and appropriate for people living on income support payments in the Illawarra or the Southern Highlands/Shoalhaven. Only 17 properties were available for people living on the minimum wage. Independent analysts do not anticipate favourable changes in affordable supply or the cost of rent in the foreseeable future.

All candidates who provided the Australian Electoral Commission with their contact details were invited to participate in the survey and to attend one of three candidate briefings on Councils' role and responsibilities in relation to affordable rental housing. All respondents were advised the survey results would be shared publicly. The presentations given in the briefings are available on request.

Results and next steps

This report presents the survey results for the Illawarra-Shoalhaven Region and for each Council. Fifty (50) surveys were completed, mostly by individual candidates and some on behalf of political parties. Only one was anonymous. The respondents who were ultimately elected are highlighted. Almost all the questions were completed in full and all comments are included with attribution. The results provide insight on the candidates' understanding of the issues surrounding the affordable rental crisis and their policy priorities. While the survey participants are listed, their individual quantitative responses are de-identified.

Resolving the affordable rental housing crisis requires leadership from all three levels of Government, commitment and engagement from the private sector and community organisations, and goodwill from the general public. Numerous studies and plans, most notably the 2021 Fielding Regional Housing Taskforce and the NSW Local Government Housing Kit, provide clear direction on the action that needs to be taken in response to the fact that "adequate housing is a fundamental human right".

Housing Trust looks forward to working with each Council on the solutions that are most suitable for each precinct in their LGA and the region as a whole.

Q1 & Q3. Respondents' LGA and political affiliations

Kiama Council - 6 candidates completed surveys from a total of 14 candidates standing for election

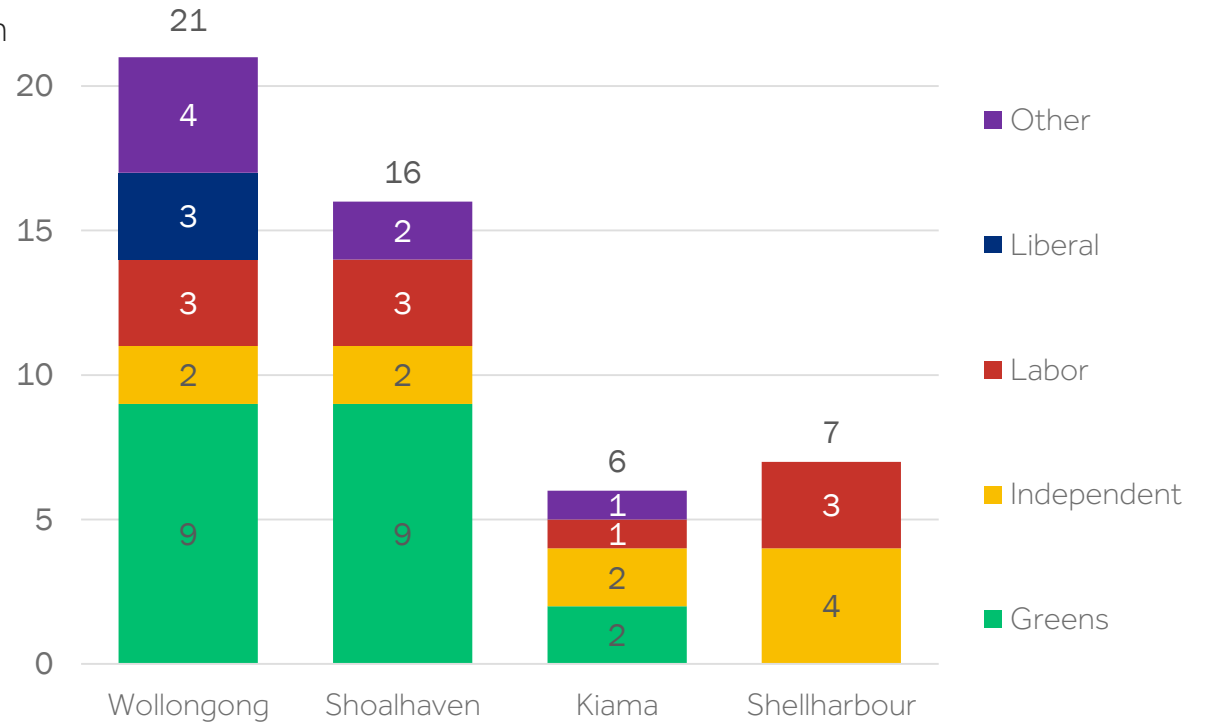
Shellharbour Council - 7 from 12 candidates

Shoalhaven Council - 16 from 24 candidates

Wollongong Council - 21 from 24 candidates.

Responses are only reported for candidates who identified themselves.

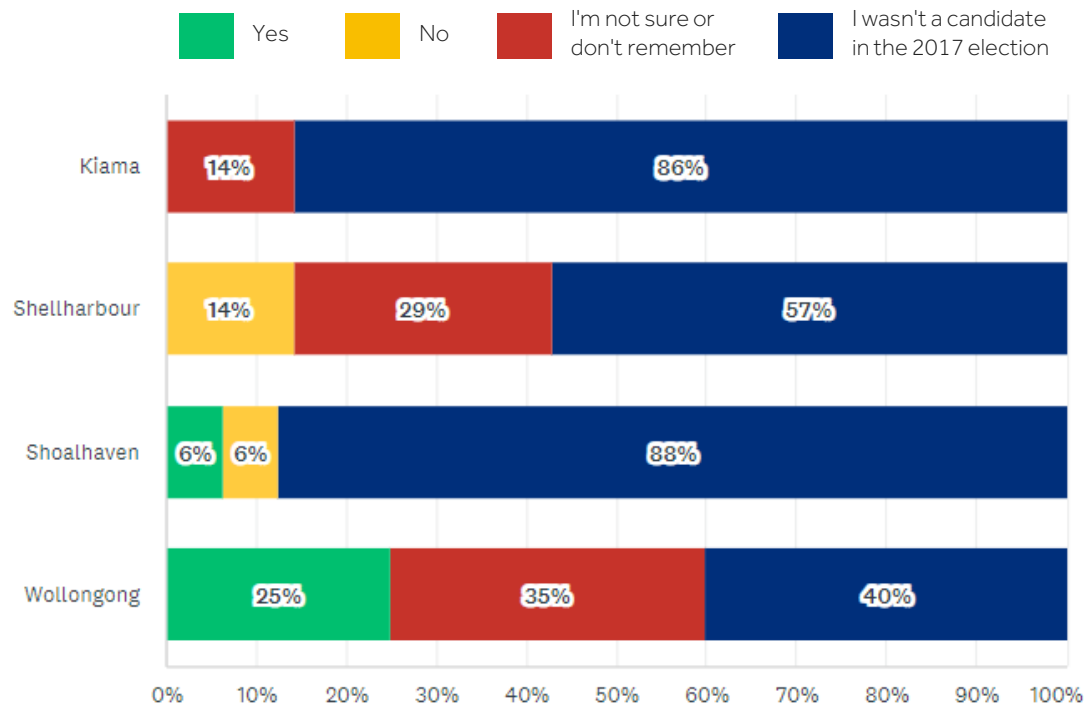
Some Wollongong Labor candidates and Shoalhaven Green candidates submitted individual responses in addition to the official responses provided by their party for a group of candidates. Party responses have been attributed to all candidates who stood for election.



Q4. Did you sign HT's candidates' pledge to support affordable rental housing in 2017?

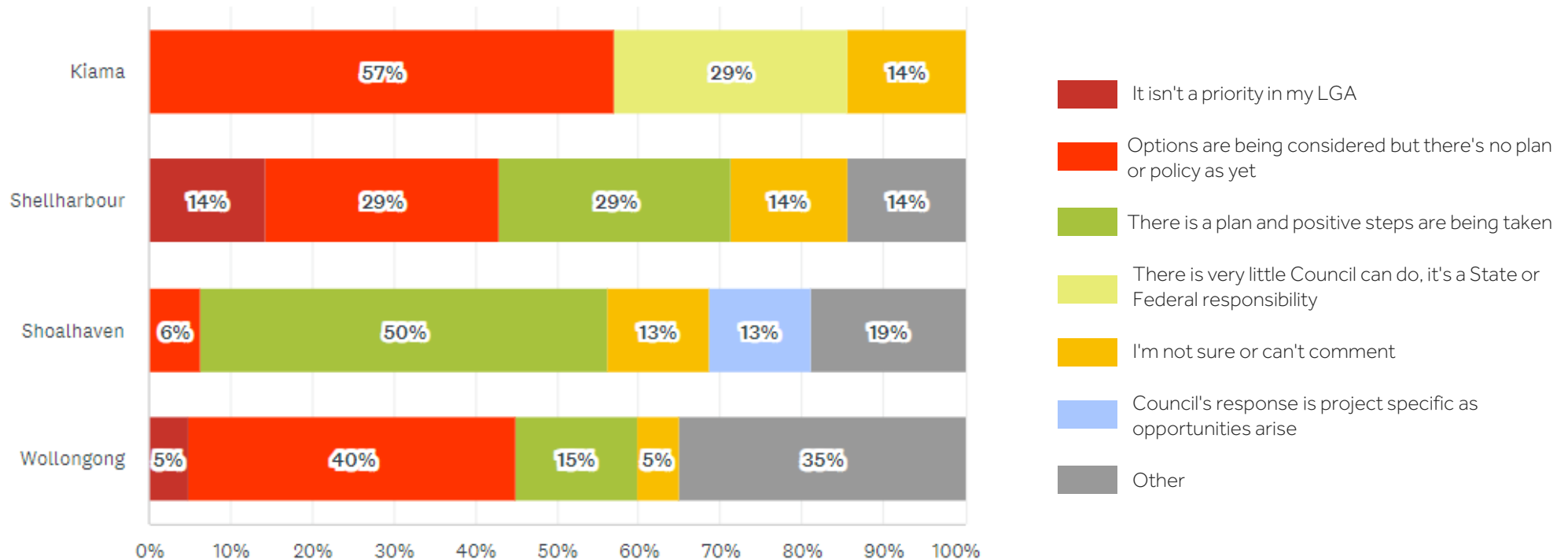
32 candidates (64% of the respondents) did not stand in the 2017 election.

Few of the candidates in 2021 signed, or remember signing, the Housing Trust pledge to increase affordable rental housing prior to the 2017 election.



Q5. Which statement best describes your Council's position on affordable rental housing?

Key findings: There is broad agreement among the Kiama, Shellharbour and Wollongong candidates that their Council is yet to develop a plan or policies to address the affordable rental crisis. Despite this some candidates, particularly those standing for re-election, consider steps are being taken. The Kiama candidates were the most unaware that Councils can (and do) influence affordable rental supply. Shoalhaven Council's plan was recognised by the candidates and seen as enabling positive steps to be taken.



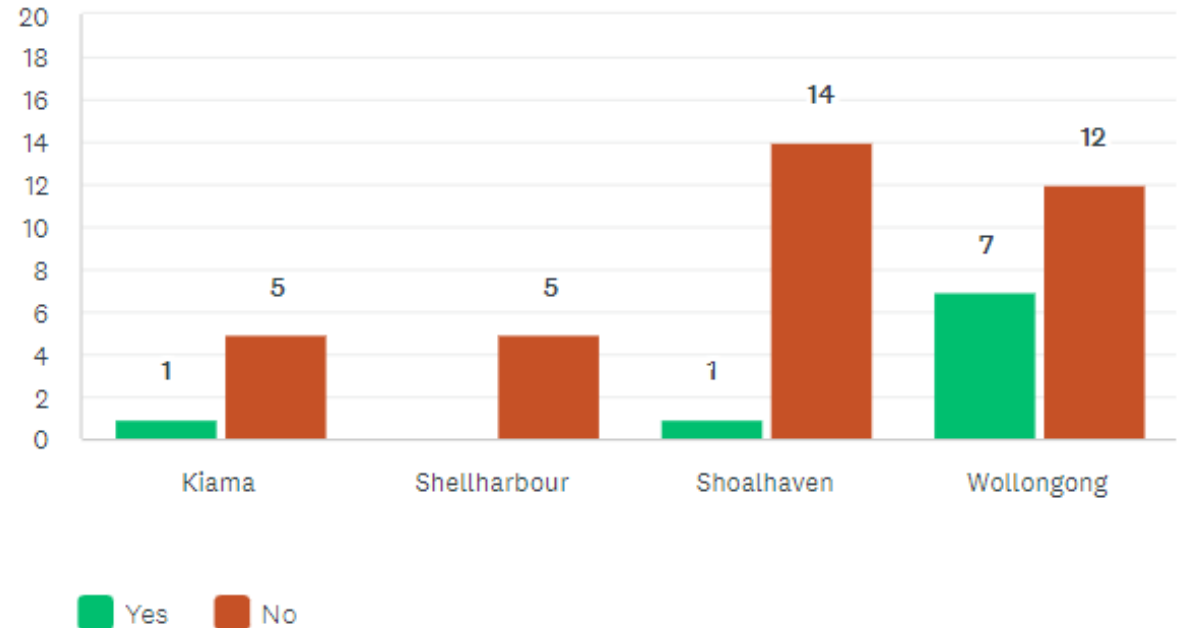
Q6. Are you currently a Councillor and standing for re-election?

Answered: 45 Skipped: 5

Finding: Councillors seeking re-election were the least engaged in the survey.

Mayoral candidates who completed the survey:

- Shellharbour – Chris Homer
- Shoalhaven – Nina Digiglio, Amanda Findley (party response), Paul Green
- Wollongong – Andrew Anthony, Tania Brown (party response), Mithra Cox, John Dorahy



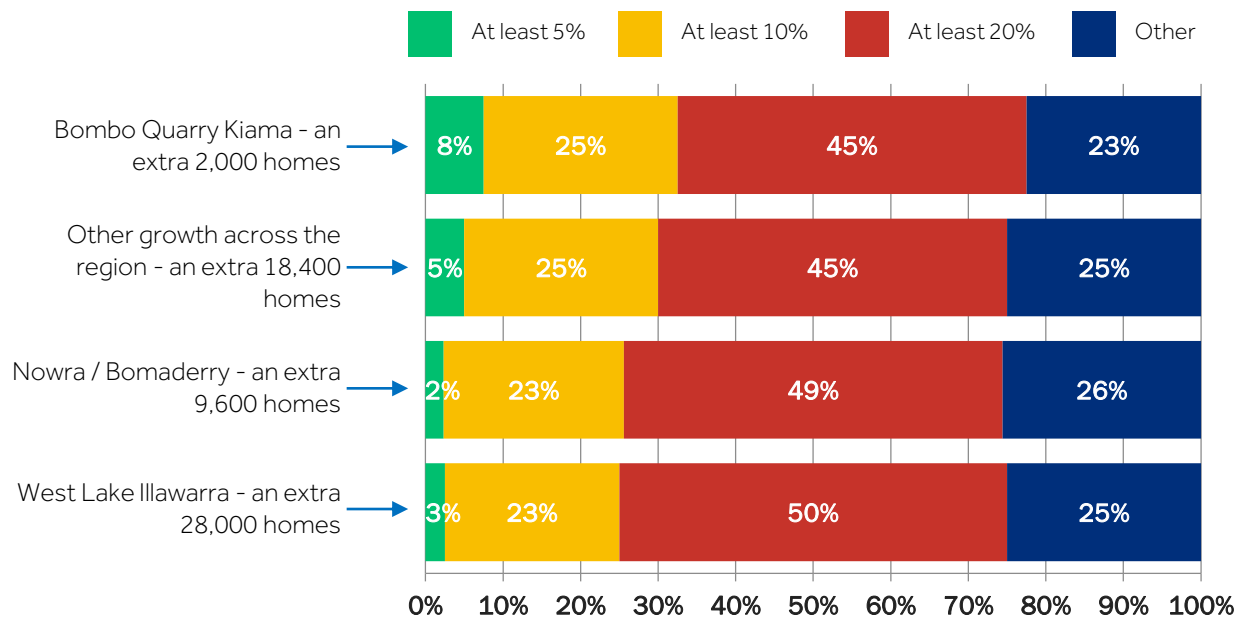
Key regional findings: Illawarra & Shoalhaven

- 98% of respondents recognise that their Local Government Area (LGA) needs more affordable rental housing, and 93% recognise Councils have a role and a responsibility to help increase the supply (slide 9).
- 89% of respondents believe affordable rental housing should be provided throughout the LGA (slide 9)
- Almost half of all respondents believe at least 20% of all new supply should be dedicated to affordable rental housing (slide 8)
- Of all the levers available to Councils, there is strong regional support for
 - The introduction of a developer contributions scheme/s
 - Disposal of surplus council land or buildings being used to increase affordable rental housing
 - Waiving development applications (DA) fees for affordable housing projects, and
 - Modifying the approval process to reduce the cost of affordable rental projects (slide 10)
- There was very strong recognition of two fundamental principles
 - The need to focus more on housing as a human right, not just on wealth creation, and that
 - Having a home is the priority, owning a home is a bonus (slide 9).

Regional analysis: Illawarra-Shoalhaven

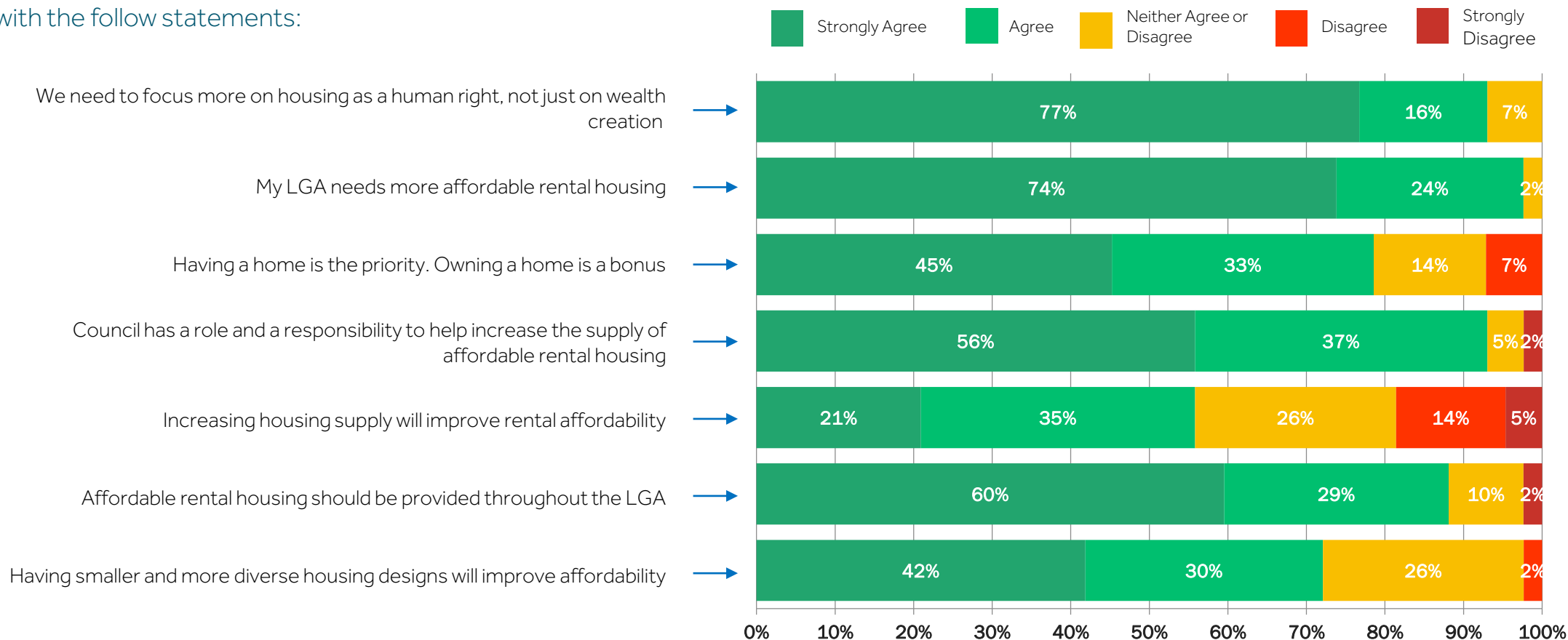
Q8. The NSW Government has recently released the Regional Plan for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. It forecasts we'll need an additional 58,000 homes over the next 20 years. The distribution is shown below. During the same period home ownership is expected to decline to 60% of the total population and to 50% for people currently aged 25-45 years.

How much of this new housing supply should be dedicated to affordable rental housing?



Regional analysis: Illawarra-Shoalhaven

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the follow statements:



Regional analysis: Illawarra-Shoalhaven

Q10. NSW councils use some or all these strategies to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

When disposing of surplus land or buildings Council should replace the 'highest and best use' financial objective with an obligation to deliver affordable rental housing

A developer contribution scheme should be introduced to help fund the supply of affordable rental housing

Council's affordable housing plan should include annual supply targets

Surplus council land or buildings should be offered to not-for-profit housing providers at a concessional price or with a long-term peppercorn lease

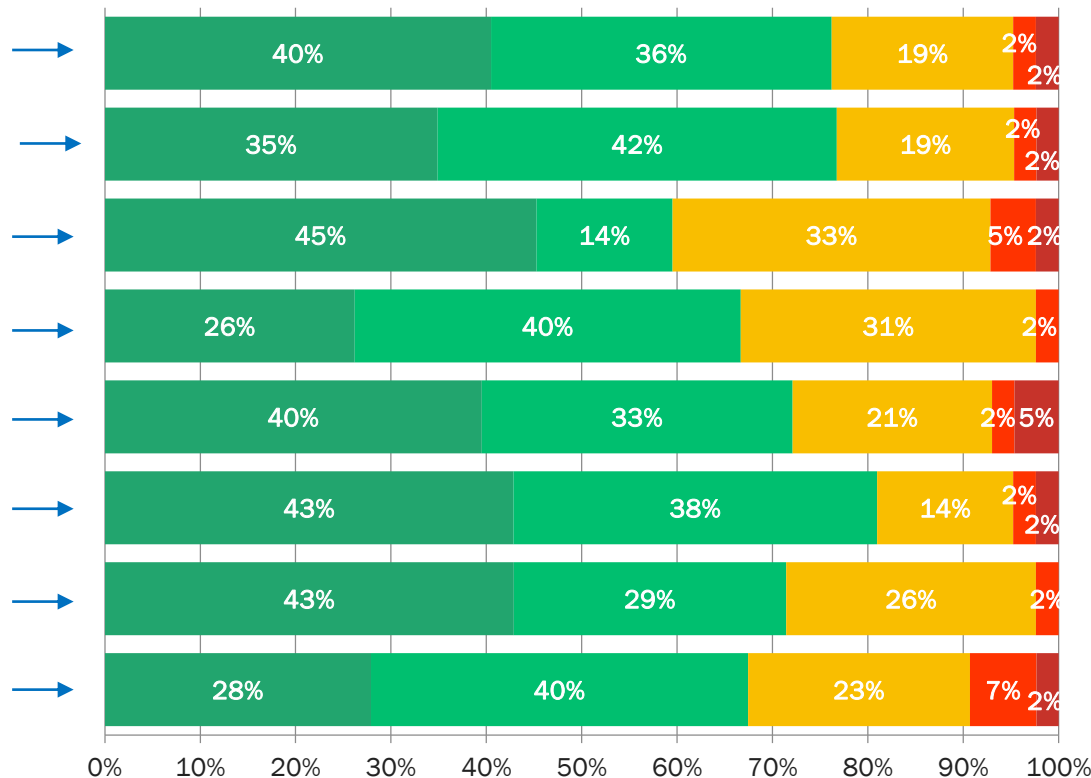
DA fees should be waived for affordable housing projects, in full or pro rata according to the mix

A minimum of 20% affordable rental housing should be required in new estates and projects with 16 or more units/homes

The Development Approval process should be modified to reduce the cost of affordable rental projects

Council's affordable housing plan should be delivered in partnership with local, not-for-profit organisations

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree



Kiama Council – 6 candidates responded

Responses were received from

Tanya George (Greens)

Kathy Rice (Greens) **Elected**

Imogen Draisma (Labor) **Elected, Deputy Mayor**

Todd Jordan (Independent)

Karen Rankema-Lang (Independent) **Elected**

Mark Croxford (Other) **Elected**

Key findings:

4 of the 9 Councillors who were ultimately elected completed the survey. This provides a sound basis for facilitating discussion and may lead to action.

The majority of respondents believe at least 10% of all new housing supply in the Kiama LGA (and elsewhere) should be dedicated for affordable rental housing (slide 13).

The majority of respondents recognise the importance of housing as a human right, agree more affordable rental housing is required in their LGA and should be dispersed throughout, and agree Council has a role and responsibility to increase supply. Not all candidates understand the drivers of affordability. Care should be taken to avoid an over reliance on increasing supply and a greater diversity of dwelling size and design as tools to improve rental affordability (slide 14).

There is strong support for a range of measures that would increase the supply of affordable rental housing. These increase amending Development Approval process to reduce costs, utilising surplus Council land, a developer contribution scheme, and leveraging partnerships with not-for-profit housing providers (slide 15).

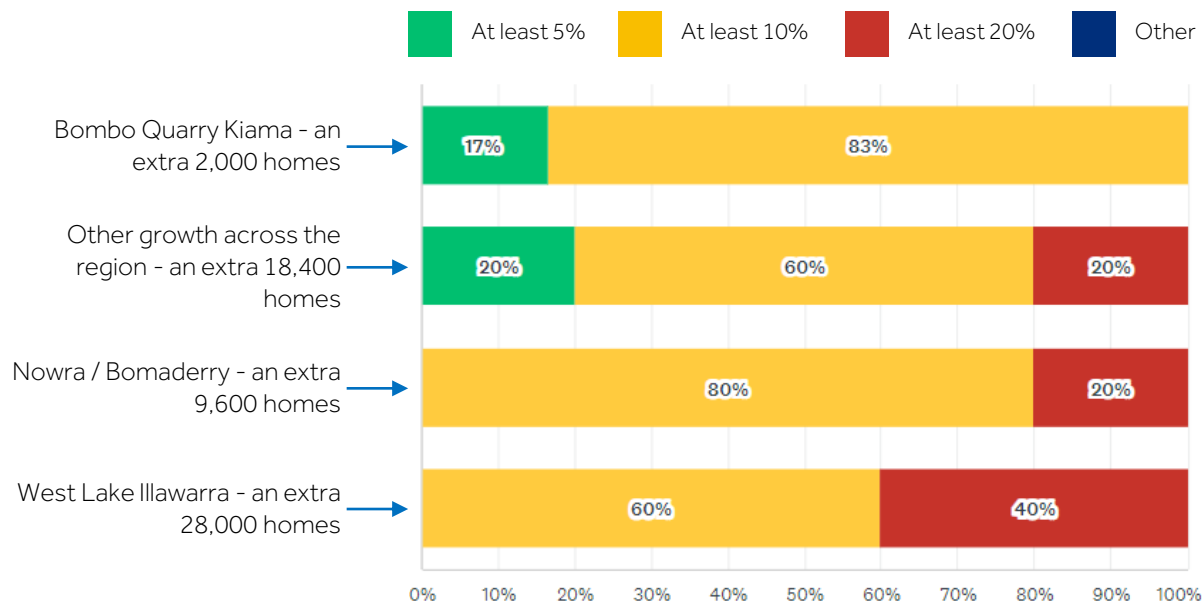
Q7. If you're already a Councillor what programs, decisions or policies have you supported that will increase the supply of affordable rental housing?

Kathy Rice – Called for a Housing Strategy to be developed, alerted Councillors to the high rate of empty houses in Kiama and low rate of rental properties, suggested Council investigate options for reducing the incentive to let houses as short term holiday rentals and asked for a study that provided data to inform whether Kiama should reduce the annual days each holiday rental could be let.

Kiama Council

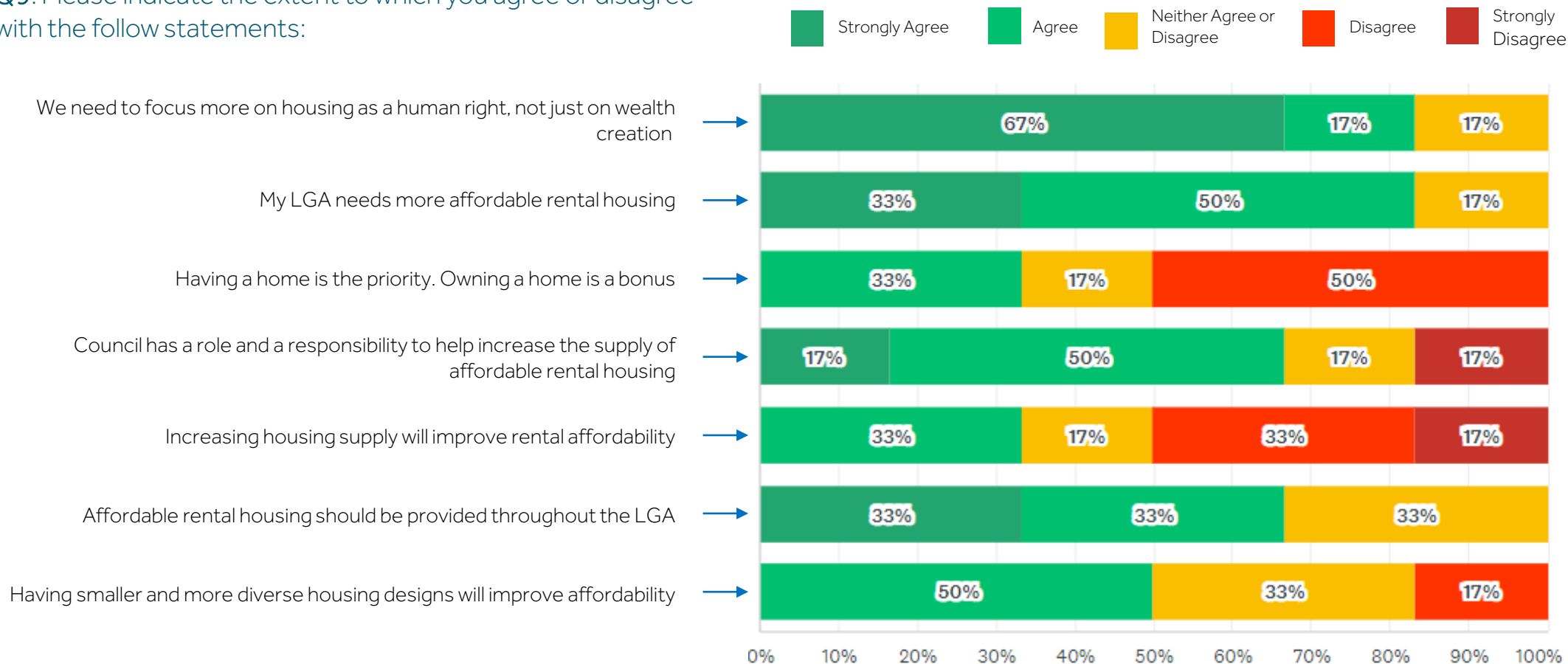
Q8. The NSW Government has recently released the Regional Plan for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. It forecasts we'll need an additional 58,000 homes over the next 20 years. The distribution is shown below. During the same period home ownership is expected to decline to 60% of the total population and to 50% for people currently aged 25-45 years.

How much of this new housing supply should be dedicated to affordable rental housing?



Kiama Council

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the follow statements:



Kiama Council

Q10. NSW councils use some or all these strategies to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

When disposing of surplus land or buildings Council should replace the 'highest and best use' financial objective with an obligation to deliver affordable rental housing

A developer contribution scheme should be introduced to help fund the supply of affordable rental housing

Council's affordable housing plan should include annual supply targets

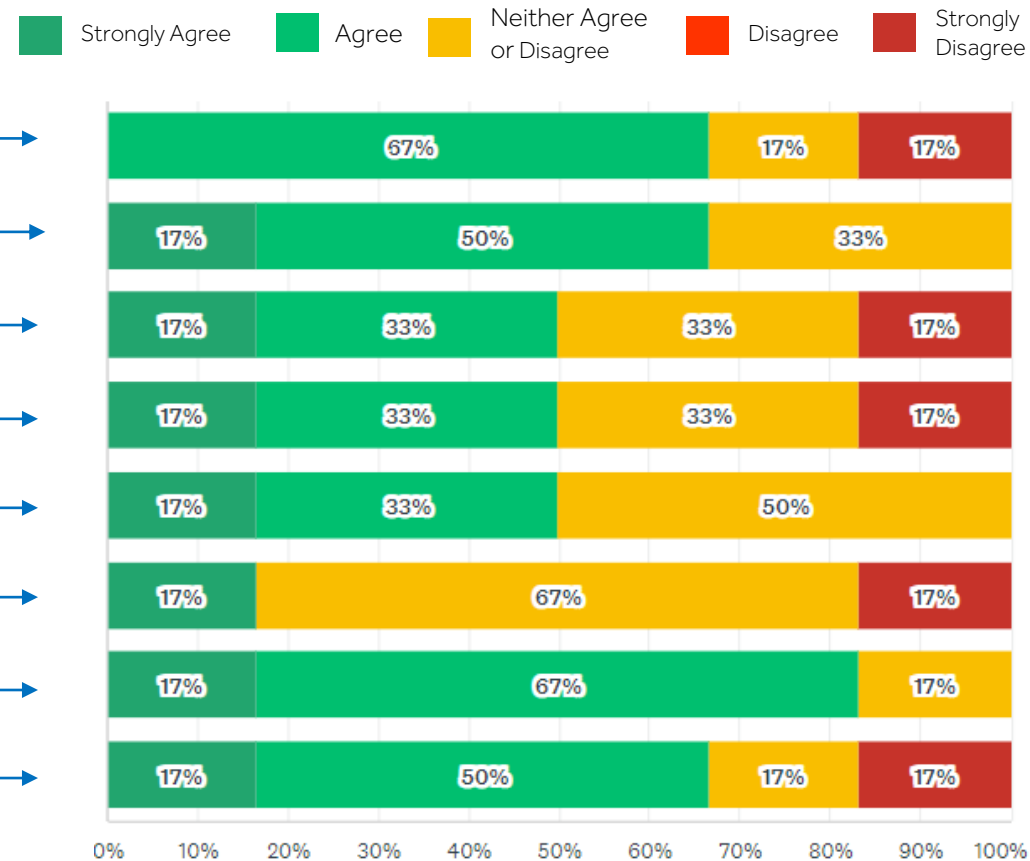
Surplus council land or buildings should be offered to not-for-profit housing providers at a concessional price or with a long-term peppercorn lease

DA fees should be waived for affordable housing projects, in full or pro rata according to the mix

A minimum of 20% affordable rental housing should be required in new estates and projects with 16 or more units/homes

The Development Approval process should be modified to reduce the cost of affordable rental projects

Council's affordable housing plan should be delivered in partnership with local, not-for-profit organisations



Shellharbour Council – 7 candidates responded

Responses were received from

John Davey (Independent) **Elected**

Peter Moran (Independent)

Chris Homer (Independent) **Elected, Mayor**

Kellie Marsh (Independent) **Elected**

Maree Edwards (Labour) **Elected**

Aarron Vann (Labor)

Stuart Geddes (Labor)

NB: Following the 2021 election the AEC announced a fresh election would be held for Ward A in July 2022. The survey was not reissued and these results reflect the views of the candidates who stood in 2021.

Key findings:

4 of the 9 Councillors who were ultimately elected completed the survey. With the Mayors leadership, this provides a sound basis for discussion and may lead to action.

The majority of respondents believe at least 20% of all new housing supply in the Shellharbour LGA (and elsewhere) should be dedicated for affordable rental housing (slide 18).

There was unanimous agreement on the need for more affordable rental housing and for it to be provided throughout the LGA, prioritising having a home ahead of ownership, and recognition that Council has a role and a responsibility to help increase supply. In developing strategies. Care should be taken to avoid an over reliance on increasing supply and a greater diversity of dwelling size and design as tools to improve rental affordability (slide 19).

There was unanimous support for the introduction of a developer contribution scheme and offering surplus Council land to not-for-profit housing providers at a concessional rate. There was also support for a range of other strategies including setting annual supply targets and partnering with NFP housing providers to deliver affordable rental housing. The full range of strategies available to Council should be considered when developing an affordable housing plan (slide 20).

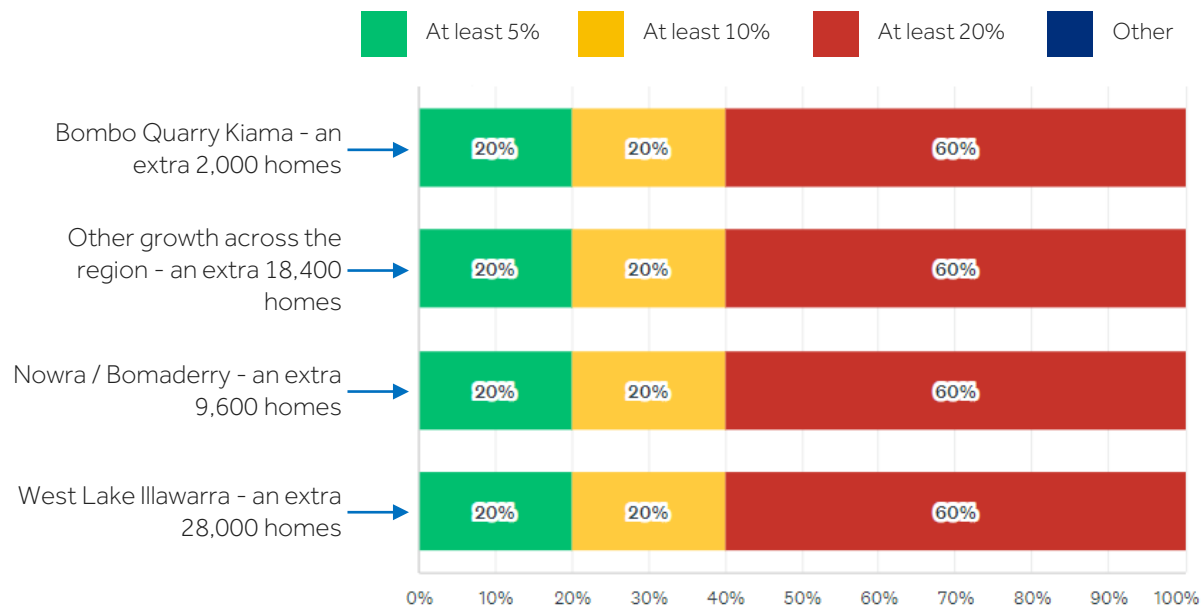
Q6. If you're already a Councillor what programs, decisions or policies have you supported that will increase the supply of affordable rental housing?

Chris Homer – Unable to comment yet as I'm a new candidate

Shellharbour Council

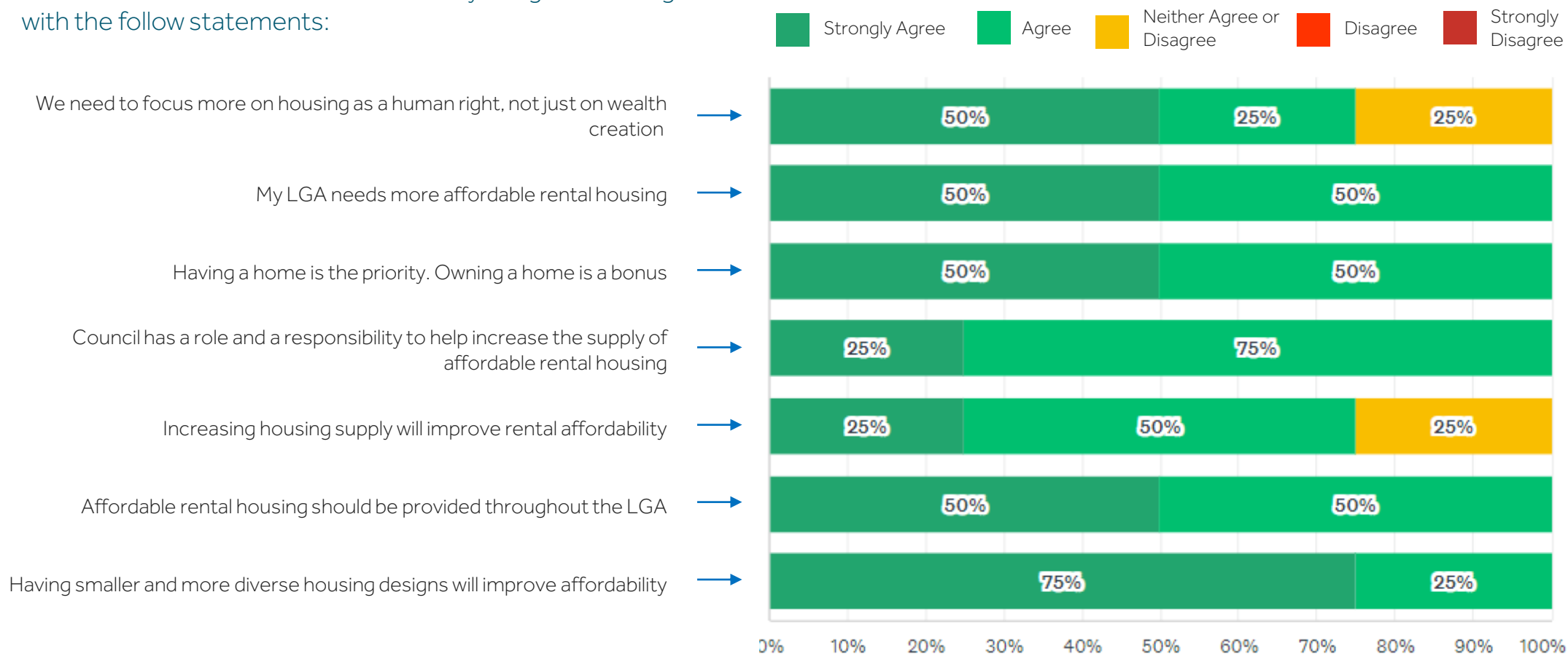
Q8. The NSW Government has recently released the Regional Plan for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. It forecasts we'll need an additional 58,000 homes over the next 20 years. The distribution is shown below. During the same period home ownership is expected to decline to 60% of the total population and to 50% for people currently aged 25-45 years.

How much of this new housing supply should be dedicated to affordable rental housing?



Shellharbour Council

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the follow statements:



Shellharbour Council

Q10. NSW councils use some or all these strategies to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

When disposing of surplus land or buildings Council should replace the 'highest and best use' financial objective with an obligation to deliver affordable rental housing

A developer contribution scheme should be introduced to help fund the supply of affordable rental housing

Council's affordable housing plan should include annual supply targets

Surplus council land or buildings should be offered to not-for-profit housing providers at a concessional price or with a long-term peppercorn lease

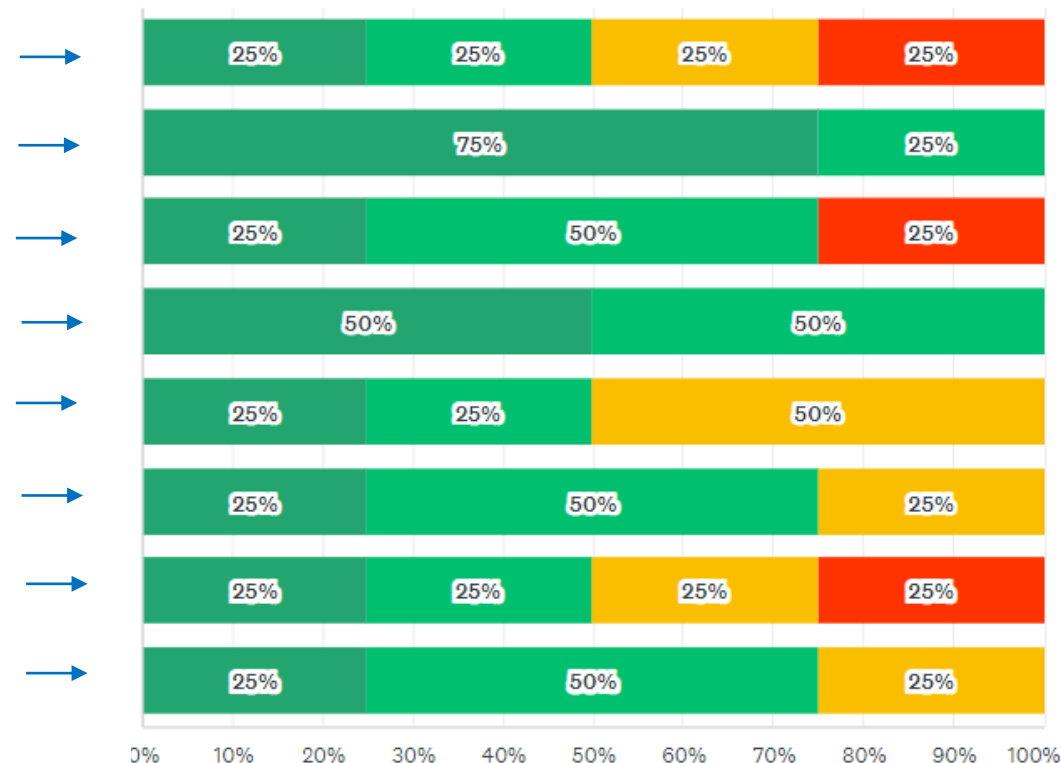
DA fees should be waived for affordable housing projects, in full or pro rata according to the mix

A minimum of 20% affordable rental housing should be required in new estates and projects with 16 or more units/homes

The Development Approval process should be modified to reduce the cost of affordable rental projects

Council's affordable housing plan should be delivered in partnership with local, not-for-profit organisations

Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree or Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree



Shoalhaven Council – 16 Candidates responded

Responses were received from

Amanda Findley (Greens) **Elected, Mayor**

Bonnie Grenne (Greens)

Debbie Killian (Greens)

Sarah Waddell (Greens)

Joanne Warren (Greens)

Evan Christen (Greens) **Elected**

Luciano Casmiri (Other)

Takesa Frank (Greens)

Bradley Stanton (Greens)

Paul Green (Independent)

Moo D'Ath (Greens) **Elected**

Tonia Gray (Greens) **Elected**

Serena Copley (Independent) **Elected**

Christine McInerney-Percy (Labor)

John Kotlash (Labor) **Elected**

Matthew Norris (Labor) **Elected**

Nina Digiglio (Other)

Key findings:

7 of the 9 Councillors who were ultimately elected completed the survey and shared their policy positions. This provides a sounds basis for discussion and further action.

The majority of respondents believe that at least 20% of all new housing supply in the Shoalhaven LGA (and elsewhere) should be dedicated for affordable rental housing (slide 23).

There was unanimous agreement on the need for more affordable rental housing, recognition that Council has a role and responsibility for increasing supply, and that supply should be distributed through the LGA. The majority also agree having a home should be prioritised ahead of home ownership. Care should be taken to avoid an over reliance on increasing supply and a greater diversity of dwelling size and design as tools to improve rental affordability (slide 24).

There was strong support for the full range of strategies available to Councils to increase affordable rental supply. This includes setting annual targets, offering surplus land to NFP housing provers at a concessional rate, as has already occurred, and partnering with local NFP housing providers to increase supply (slide 25)

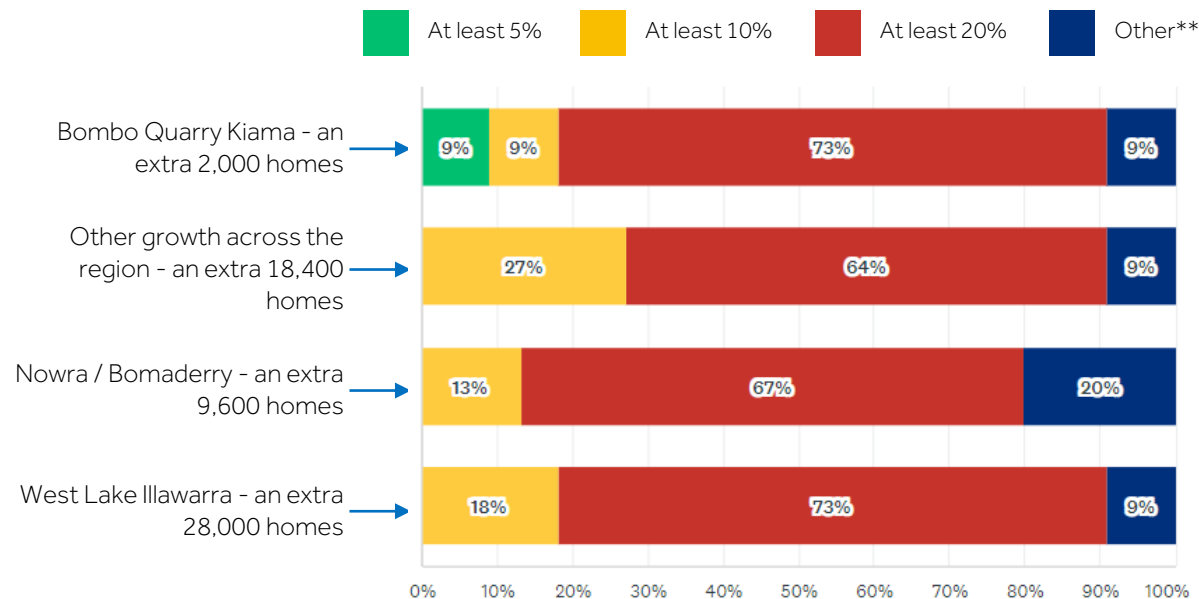
Q7. If you're already a Councillor what programs, decisions or policies have you supported that will increase the supply of affordable rental housing?

Nina Digiglio – Land release for affordable housing, the Coomea Street Affordable Housing Strategy. Assisting homeless [sic] residents obtain housing with SALT ministries and Peter Dover as they phone help. Urge B&B businesses to limit visitors and encourage permanent rental. Conducting a Housing Forum on 9th July to discuss community housing solutions.

Shoalhaven Council

Q8. The NSW Government has recently released the Regional Plan for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. It forecasts we'll need an additional 58,000 homes over the next 20 years. The distribution is shown below. During the same period home ownership is expected to decline to 60% of the total population and to 50% for people currently aged 25-45 years.

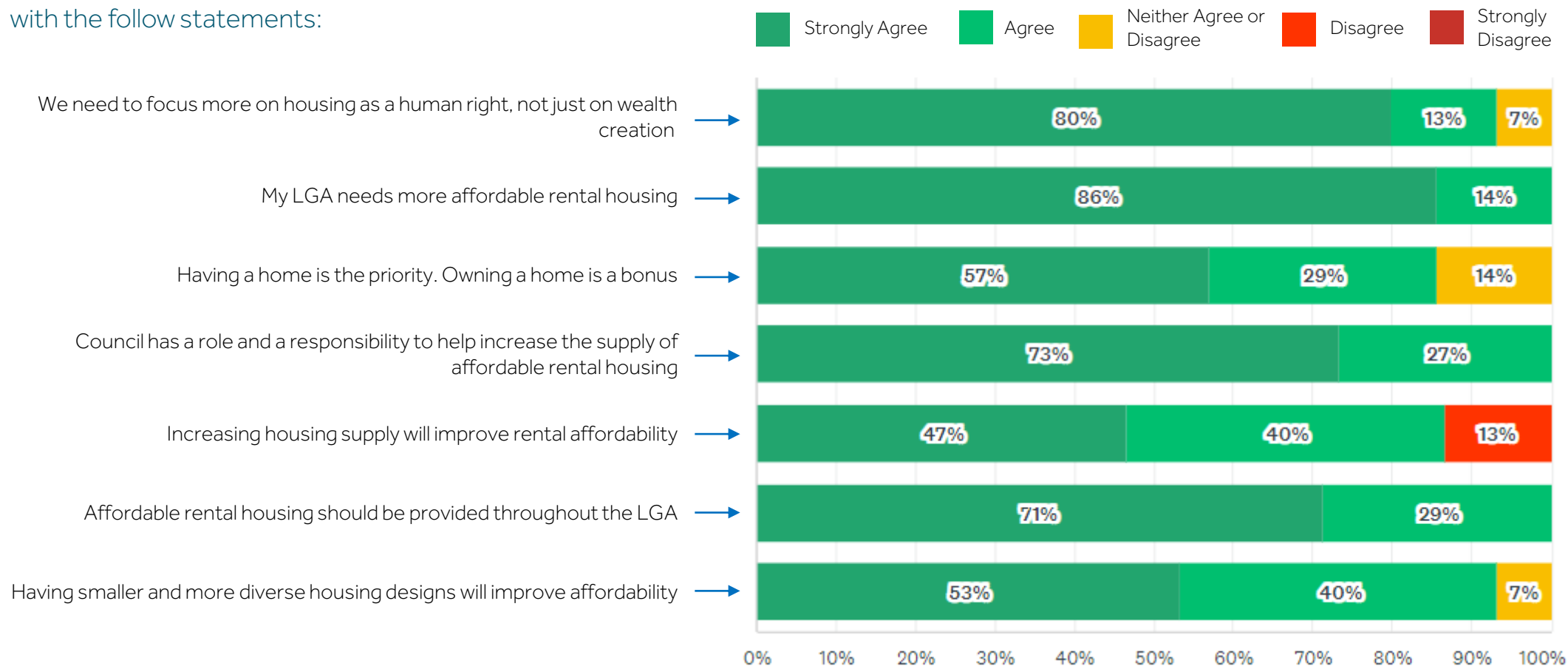
How much of this new housing supply should be dedicated to affordable rental housing?



Comment: Moo D'Ath - I can't comment on the situation in these (other) areas but feel that the minimum should be 10%. With the figures given and personal research I feel this is an extremely urgent issue and feel very strongly that as a council we need to invest in the future of our city by providing options of affordable housing.

Shoalhaven Council

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the follow statements:



Shoalhaven Council

Q10. NSW councils use some or all these strategies to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

When disposing of surplus land or buildings Council should replace the 'highest and best use' financial objective with an obligation to deliver affordable rental housing

A developer contribution scheme should be introduced to help fund the supply of affordable rental housing

Council's affordable housing plan should include annual supply targets

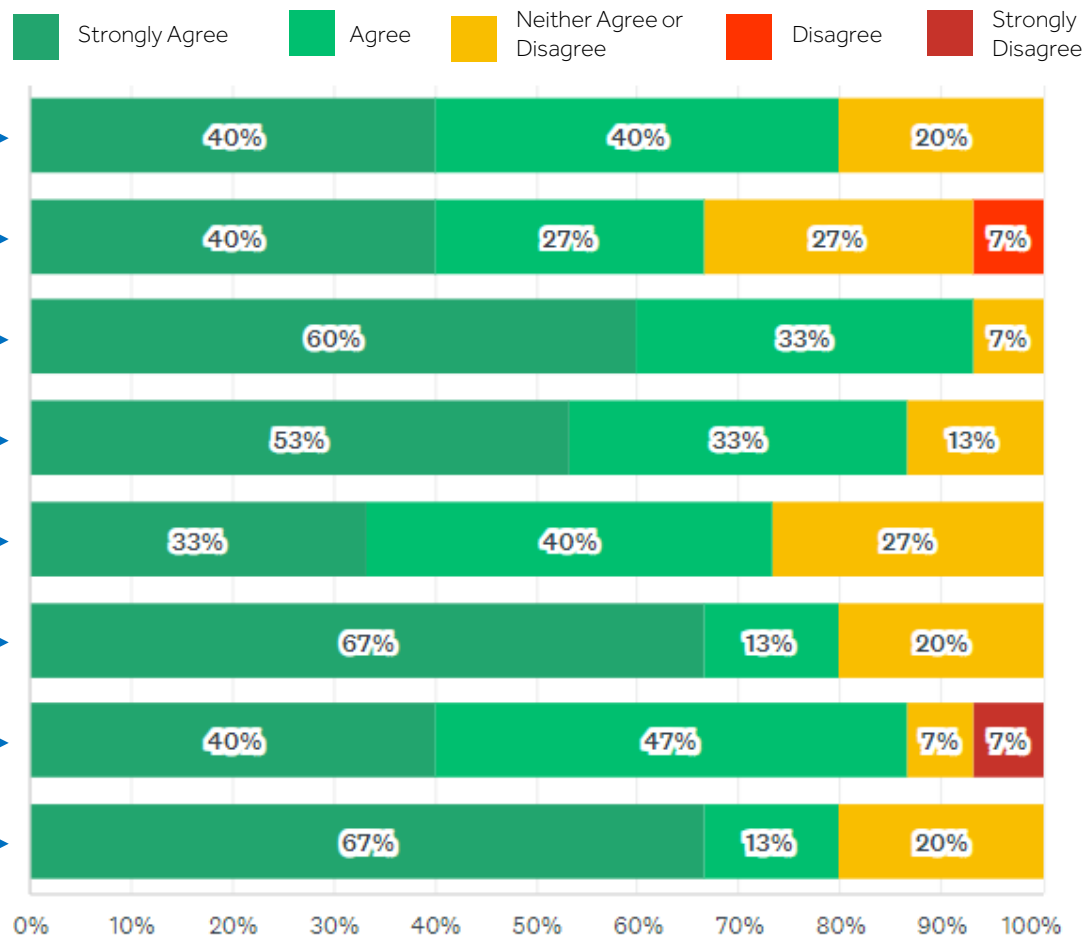
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The Development Approval process should be modified to reduce the cost of affordable rental projects

Council's affordable housing plan should be delivered in partnership with local, not-for-profit organisations



Wollongong Council – 21 candidates responded

Responses were received from

Cath Blakey (Greens) Elected	Martin Cubby (Greens)
Mithra Cox (Greens) Elected	Stephen Young (Greens)
Bronwyn Batten (Greens)	Jess Whittaker (Greens)
Harris Cheung (Greens)	
John Gill (Other)	Louise Meyrick (Independent)
Dom Figliomeni (Independent) Elected	
Suzanne de Vive (Other)	Andrew Anthony (Other)
Tania Brown (provided the Labor response) Elected, Deputy Mayor	
David Brown (Labor) Elected	Ann Martin (Labor) Elected
Janice Kershaw (Labor) Elected	Linda Campbell (Labor) Elected
Harris Cheung (Greens)	
Cameron Walters (Liberal) Elected	
John Dorahy (Liberal) Elected	Philip Clifford (Liberal)
Anonymous x1	

Key findings:

10 of the 13 Councillors who were ultimately elected completed the survey and/or represent a political party that shared their policy position. This provides a mandate for action in the Wollongong LGA.

The majority of respondents support at least 20% of all new supply being dedicated as affordable rental housing however almost half provided contextual comments rather than nominating a target (slide 29).

There was unanimous recognition of the need for more affordable rental housing and strong support for supply being distributed throughout the LGA. Strong support was also expressed for the view that having a home should be prioritised ahead of home ownership. The clear majority of respondents recognise that Council has a role and responsibility to help increase affordable rental supply. There is some understanding of the limited value of increasing housing supply and diversifying dwelling size and design as ways to improve rental affordability (slide 30).

The majority of respondents agree that the full range of strategies available to Council should be used to increase affordable rental supply and that annual targets should be established. There is strong support for a developer contribution schemes, partnering with a NFP housing provider to increase supply, and revising the Development Approval process to reduce costs (slide 31).

Q7. If you're already a Councillor what programs, decisions or policies have you supported that will increase the supply of affordable rental housing?

Catherine Blakey

- Setting an in-principle 30% affordable housing target for all new multi-unit developments, residential rezonings and voluntary planning agreements (sadly not supported by the majority of other Councillors at this point, but in the mean time I have supported the development of the Housing Options Paper which will lead to Housing and Affordable Housing Strategy that enables council to quality for SEPP 70)
- Inclusion of 35 affordable rental dwellings in the former Corrimal Cokeworks rezoning (I support the affordable rentals, but voted against the finilisation of the planning proposal on 1st November as the state heritage listing hadn't been resolved, was not incorporated into the masterplan)
- Inclusion of 5% affordable rental dwellings in the former Port Kembla Public School rezoning
- Allocating \$4.3M to the Housing Trust for the construction of affordable housing
- Support an EOI process for allocating \$6M towards secure and affordable rental and/or pathways to home ownership for low to moderate income earners

Mithra Cox

- I tabled a motion for Council to set an in-principle 30% affordable housing target for all new multi-unit developments, residential rezonings and voluntary planning agreements (sadly not supported by the majority of other Councillors at this point, but in the meantime I have supported the development of the Housing Options Paper which will lead to Housing and Affordable Housing Strategy that enables council to quality for SEPP 70)
- Inclusion of 5% affordable rental dwellings in the former Port Kembla Public School rezoning
- Allocating \$4.3M to the Housing Trust for the construction of affordable housing
- Tabled a motion in 2018 for Council to prioritise the housing crisis and affordable housing. This was unanimously supported by Council
- Pursuit of the Housing Options Paper to enable council to quality for SEPP 70 as mechanism to increase the supply of affordable rental housing and affordable home ownership

John Dorahy

- I have supported Council making more Council owned property available for Affordable Housing unfortunately receiving pushback from the current LM and Labor Councillors.

Dom Figliomeni

- Minimum 5% affordable housing in multi unit developments
- Different housing types to suit different circumstances.
- First tranche allocation of funds held in trust by WCC for affordable housing.
- Development of affordable housing strategy.

Ann Martin

- The Labor team has raised the need to review and seek the means to provide for amendments through Council to the Affordable Housing SEPP which limits the security for tenants to 10 years only.
- The Labor team introduced the opportunity of Council to actively engage with affordable housing in my previous term of Council, which resulted in funding from the then Federal Labor Party to the development of affordable housing opportunities in the West Dapto release area. This also required Council renegotiation to extend the geographic area that the funding could be used with the current Federal Liberal Government, and a subsequent investment of over 4 million dollars in the first scheme to support affordable housing in partnership with the Housing Trust.
- Working to support and engage with the affordable housing area in my day job as a planner
- As an individual I am working with local community organisations, and housing providers to investigate future opportunities for establishing different housing models for families, older women, and including adaptable housing.
- Working as an individual to seek support and play a role in the Glendarrah Co Housing project in Hazlebrook, and the Wollongong Housing Co Op, including liaising with officers and the Minister for Housing to secure the 30 year old Wollongong Housing Co Ops future, so far unsuccessfully.

Cameron Walters

- Supportive of Wollongong Council preparing an Affordable Housing Strategy
- Supported Wollongong Council to use the remaining Commonwealth grant through the 'Building Better Regional Cities' program to support home ownership
- Pushed for more affordable housing rezonings, like the Corrimal Coke Works site

Wollongong Council

Q8. The NSW Government has recently released the Regional Plan for the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. It forecasts we'll need an additional 58,000 homes over the next 20 years, distributed as shown. During the same period home ownership is expected to decline to 60% of the total population and to 50% for people currently aged 25-45 years.

How much of this new housing supply should be dedicated to affordable rental housing?

Comments:

Cameron Walters - We must push for the maximum that is available and deliver the most for the community.

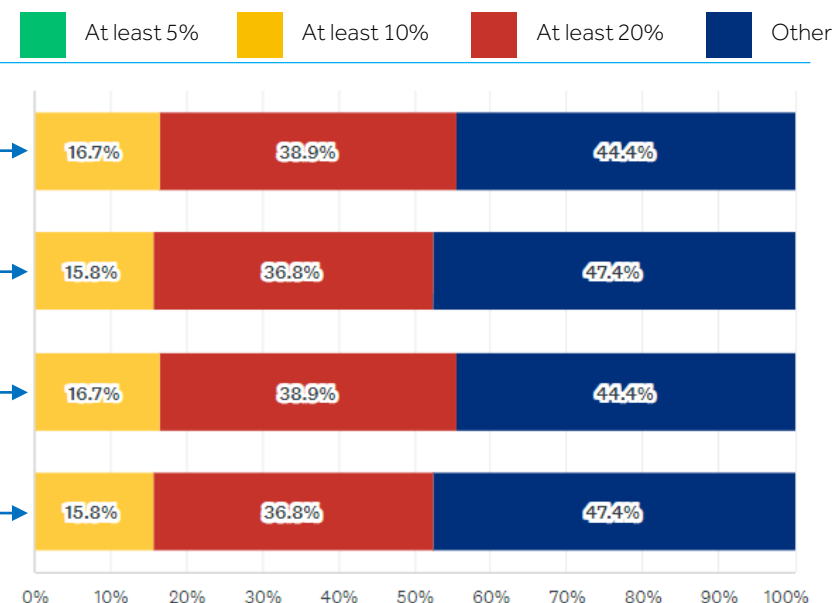
Bronwyn Batten - Greens policy is for 30% affordable housing

John Dorahy - It is difficult to apportion a specific percentage as there are so many variables to consider in each region. For Wollongong I suggest 20% is a good starting point and seek adjustment points dependent on needs and property availability

Louise Meyrick - My focus is on housing affordability in Wollongong City Council, and I look forward to contributing to the development of a set of strategies that address the complex range of problems

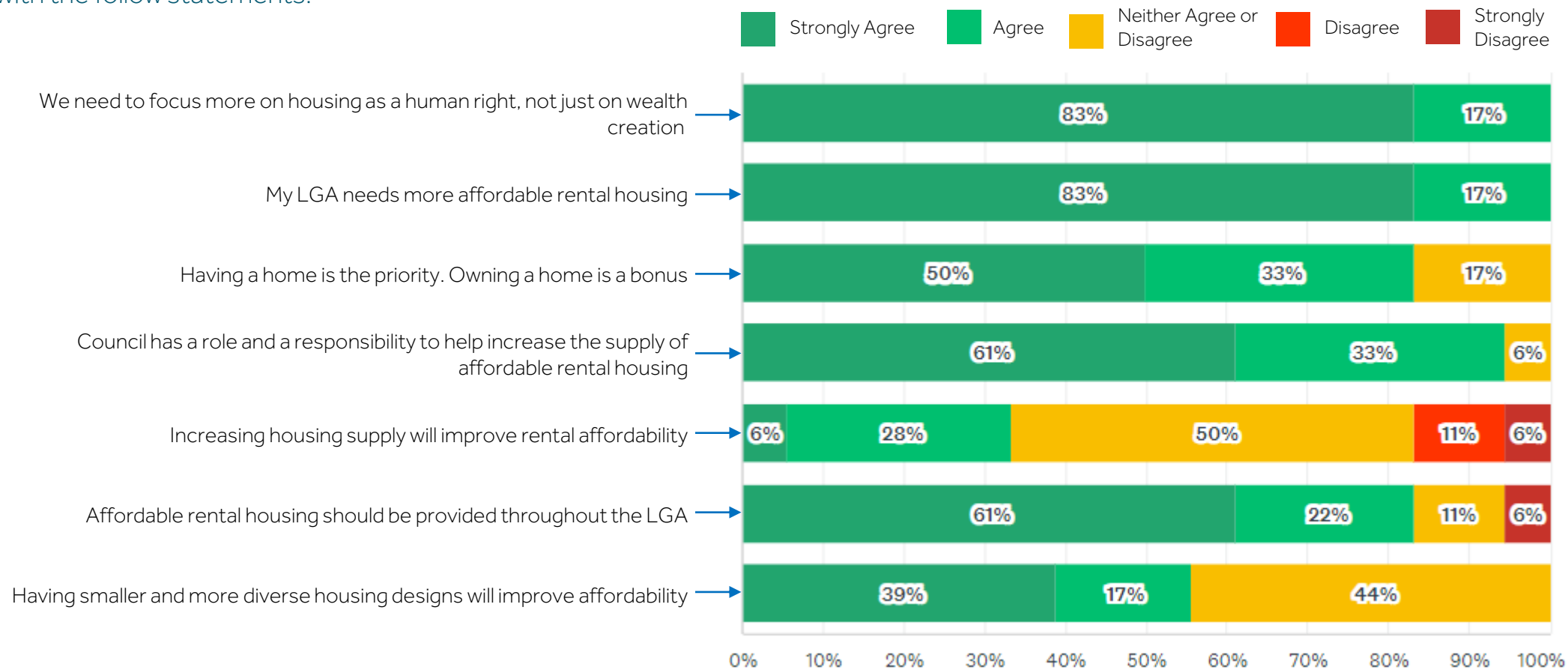
Dom Figliomeni - Question is who pays if the Govt then whatever the demand is if private developer then need to ensure business case not compromised as they can invest elsewhere exacerbating the problem

John Gill - Honestly, I don't know enough to make a reasonable response to this. I am very keen to learn and very interested in how housing affordability can be improved for buyers as well as renters. I think it is a complex problem that requires Federal, State and Local Government to work together to achieve a solution



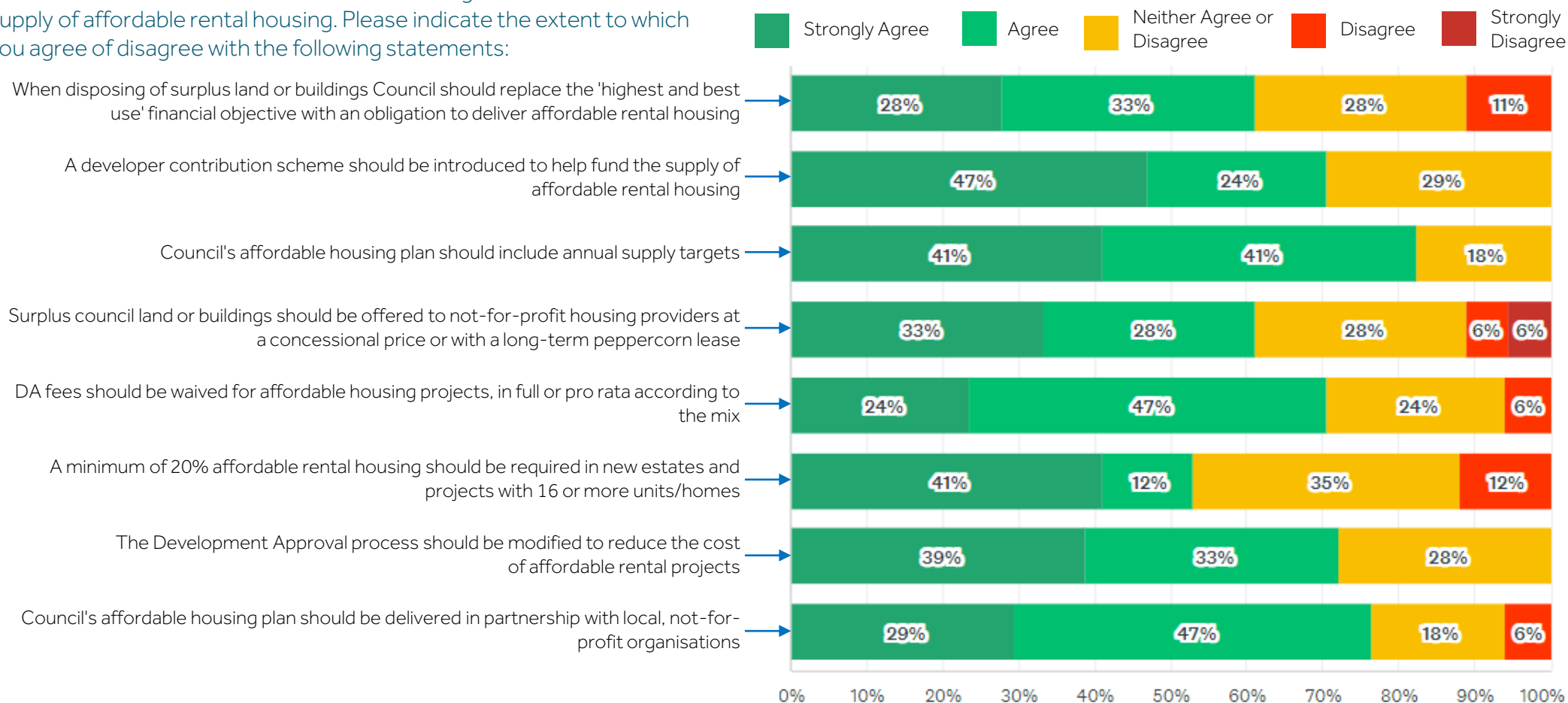
Wollongong Council

Q9. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Wollongong Council

Q10. NSW councils use some or all these strategies to increase the supply of affordable rental housing. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:



Appendix A – Nov 2021 Council scorecard issued by Housing Trust



COUNCIL SCORECARD



WOLLONGONG
CITY COUNCIL

SHELLHARBOUR
CITY COUNCIL

KIAMA
COUNCIL

SHOALHAVEN
COUNCIL

Policy or plan in place to address Affordable Rental Housing	In progress	Yes	No	Yes
Targets that reflect local need for Affordable Rental Housing	No	No	No	No
Commitment to provide land for Affordable Rental Housing	No	No	No	Yes
Waiving DA Fees for Affordable Rental Housing projects	No	No	No	No
Mandating developers to contribute to Affordable Rental Housing	No	No	No	Yes
RATING	D	D	F	B

Contact

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Housing
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2021 Council candidates' survey