

Engagement Report



**Community Recovery Plan
June 2020**

Contents

Engagement summary	3
Engagement purpose and program	3
Key outcomes from the engagement	3
Engagement methodology	6
Background	6
Objectives and guiding principles	6
Engagement approach	7
Engagement activities	7
Engagement outcomes	10
The impact of the pandemic	10
Needs for recovery	11
The role the City should play in recovery	12
Concerns for Sydney’s future	13
Opportunities for Sydney’s future	14
Stakeholder surveys review	14
Other feedback and insights	15
Appendices	16

Engagement summary

From 18 May to 3 June 2020 the City of Sydney asked the community for their insights on the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, their needs for recovery and how the City can support recovery.

The insights gained provide a platform for the City to work with the community on recovery, ensuring we understand and are responsive to their needs.

This report will outline the community engagement activities that took place and summarise the findings from workshops, an online survey and secondary research.

Engagement purpose and program

The City sought insights from the community for the development of our community recovery plan to:

- Ensure the community recovery plan aligns with how the community is experiencing the impacts of Covid-19 and respond to community concerns and needs.
- Provide a platform to continue work with the community on recovery.

The engagement program included:

- Online surveys for community and businesses.
- Lord Mayor roundtables and online facilitated workshops with community and business stakeholders.
- Review of outcomes from surveys carried out by community and industry stakeholders.

Key outcomes from the engagement

The community expressed a clear desire to be part of their own recovery. The act of asking the community was appreciated and contributes to maintaining a high level of trust between the community and the City. A continuing dialogue with the community, businesses and stakeholders, sharing our insights and data with the community and in turn valuing their knowledge and insights will provide a strong platform for recovery.

“Thank you for taking the time to find out about what your community believes is a priority.”

The impacts of the pandemic have been widespread. Many acknowledged their own social isolation has contributed to health and wellbeing concerns and increased anxiety related to financial impacts, job losses, housing stress and access to essential services.

A third have felt lonely or have mental health and wellbeing concerns. About 40% have lost jobs or experienced reduced income and as many are worried about job security. 77% of businesses surveyed had reduced staffing levels during the Covid-19 restrictions.

The community sector raised concerns for non-citizens including asylum seekers and international students. Food security for these most vulnerable community members will continue to be a concern.

“Businesses being supported so they can grow and take on all those unemployed people. There are lots of people struggling now.”

Concern for others

People are overwhelmingly concerned about others. Half of those surveyed were worried about people who are important to them and 74% said it was very important for council to support vulnerable people during the recovery. This was the most strongly supported action council could take. Local residents groups identified how communities had come together to support each other. There was growing optimism that actions taken during the pandemic could contribute to ongoing action on long-term concerns such as ending homelessness in Sydney.

“Continuation of the increased tolerance and kindness shown to others especially housing the homeless, and better service and financial support for people who are unemployed or living on low incomes”

Clear information

The community told us they need accurate information to help build confidence about when it is safe to return to their normal activities. 68% of people surveyed said that clear communications from the City are very important. Accessible communication was identified as very important including using different formats and channels and being aware that not everyone has access to digital technology.

“Media hype has scared people.”

Sydney as safe

Promoting Sydney as a safe place is an important action to help the arts and cultural sector and businesses rebuild. This was identified as a more significant challenge for the city centre than local main streets where people were starting to feel comfortable again. While about half those surveyed said they were ready visit their local cafes and restaurants now, most people indicated that it would take longer for them to feel confident going to indoor cultural and community events.

“Clear guidelines for CBD workers and visitors on how to interact to ensure safety but also get back to work. Transport solutions that don’t clog up the streets.”

Importance of public space

The community deeply valued public space during the pandemic. Our current predicament is seen by many as a trigger to rethink how we use public space and make more space available for walking, cycling, meeting up and cultural and community events. Using public outdoor space was identified by arts organisations and businesses as an alternative to indoor venues and a way to build confidence and bring people back.

“Eating and drinking later, spreading out on footpaths and roads”

“Greater appreciation for the outdoors, for the simple pleasures of walking in a park and getting some fresh air. An amazing ability for us to all cooperate and help each other. We’ve all gained new knowledge from this new experience.”

Support for business and the cultural sector

Survey results identified financial support, marketing, clear communications, and local activations and events as the most useful ways the City could support businesses to recover. There is a desire to promote the unique cultural experiences of Sydney to local and regional visitors; support innovation and collaborate and negotiate with landowners and big employers to open up new opportunities. The City's role as an advocate particularly for affordable housing and the arts and cultural sector was highly valued.

“Marketing and promotion needs to include profiling local businesses, neighbourhood character, what to do in the city, and what is happening locally.”

Positive outcomes

The community identified positive impacts as including flexible working arrangements (close to 50%), more time with family (close to 50%), acts of kindness (40%) and see this an opportunity to build a more caring society. People referred to a renewed sense of working together and that there was greater awareness of the needs and experiences of different people within our communities.

Business, the cultural community and local residents liked the idea of a community celebration as an important step in Sydney's recovery.

“Hopefully there will be more kindness and tolerance now”

“A positive impact for me, I can work from home less travelling to work. I've enjoyed not stressing and spending time with my family”

Concerns for the future

There are increasing concerns about the impacts on the economy when the federal government's support package ends in September. Continuing physical distancing restrictions were a concern to the arts, cultural and entertainment sectors. Reduced international travel is a long term problem for the tourism and hospitality sector. There is growing concern for the sustainability of the NGO sector who have worked tirelessly to support the most vulnerable members of the community, especially in the face of more financial stress on people as a result of cut-backs to JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments.

We asked people about their greatest concerns for Sydney's future in March 2019 and again in May 2020. Top concerns remain traffic congestion and inadequate public transport, lack of affordable housing and loss of places for entertainment and cultural expression. Importantly, more people are now worried about the impacts of climate change ranking second after traffic congestion.

“I hope this is taken as an opportunity to make a leap forward in environmental protection to address climate change”

Engagement methodology

Background

The City of Sydney Council resolved at its meeting on 4 May 2020 to prepare a Community Recovery Plan in response to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

While there is still a lot of uncertainty about the future, developing a plan for recovery is important to build trust and confidence in the community.

The Community Recovery Plan is informed by health advice from state and federal governments and guided by principles consistent with Sustainable Sydney 2030. These include inclusive and equitable social and economic sustainability, underpinned by environmental sustainability, and the critical contribution of artists and the creative sector in recovering a strong society.

The plan has also been informed by consultation with businesses and our communities on the impacts of the pandemic, the community's needs, and the role the City should play in Sydney's recovery.

This report examines the consultation activities undertaken by the City and their outcomes.

Objectives and guiding principles

Community engagement plays a central role in the transition from government-led actions in response to a crisis to the community regaining a sense of control over their lives during recovery. People must have an opportunity to influence decisions that affect the recovery of the city and their communities.

The following engagement objectives guide the way we work with the community on recovery. These align with the City's community engagement principles of integrity, inclusiveness, dialogue and influence and contribute to an overarching principle of recovery that people and organisations are empowered, connected and effective community builders, involved in the change in the city and shaping their future.

Integrity

- We will provide our communities with clear, accurate and timely information.
- We will coordinate engagement activities to ensure best value for our communities.

Inclusiveness

- We will reach vulnerable people and strive to overcome barriers including lack of digital access and we will ensure our communications are inclusive.
- We will work with community networks and services to broaden the reach of our engagement and to build community resilience.

Dialogue

- We will check-in and respond to our communities about their needs throughout the recovery.

- We will make best use of the information our community-facing services and programs collect to in fine tune the City’s ongoing response.

Influence

- We will strengthen relationships within our communities by regularly sharing our insights from engagement and research on recovery progress.
- We will ensure that people know we value the information and insights they give us and that we act on it.

Engagement approach

The City sought a combination of qualitative and quantitative information from community members, businesses and sector representatives on:

- the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on their lives and businesses
- what their personal, community and sector’s needs were for recovery
- how the City can support the community during recovery
- what opportunities exist for collaboration during recovery
- what their concerns were for the future of Sydney
- how the pandemic may change Sydney.

Engagement activities included:

- online surveys for community and businesses
- Lord Mayor roundtables and online facilitated workshops with community and business stakeholders
- a review of twelve surveys undertaken by stakeholders across a variety of sectors.

Engagement activities

Lord Mayor roundtables and online facilitated workshops

A series of online roundtables and workshops were undertaken to understand specific issues affecting particular industry and community sectors that have been heavily impacted by the pandemic. 165 stakeholder representatives attended these sessions.

The Lord Mayor hosted five online recovery roundtables:

- Arts and culture
- Resident action groups
- Community and food security
- Hotels and tourism
- Small business

City staff facilitated six online recovery workshops:

- Retail and hospitality
- Creative and arts
- Night time economy

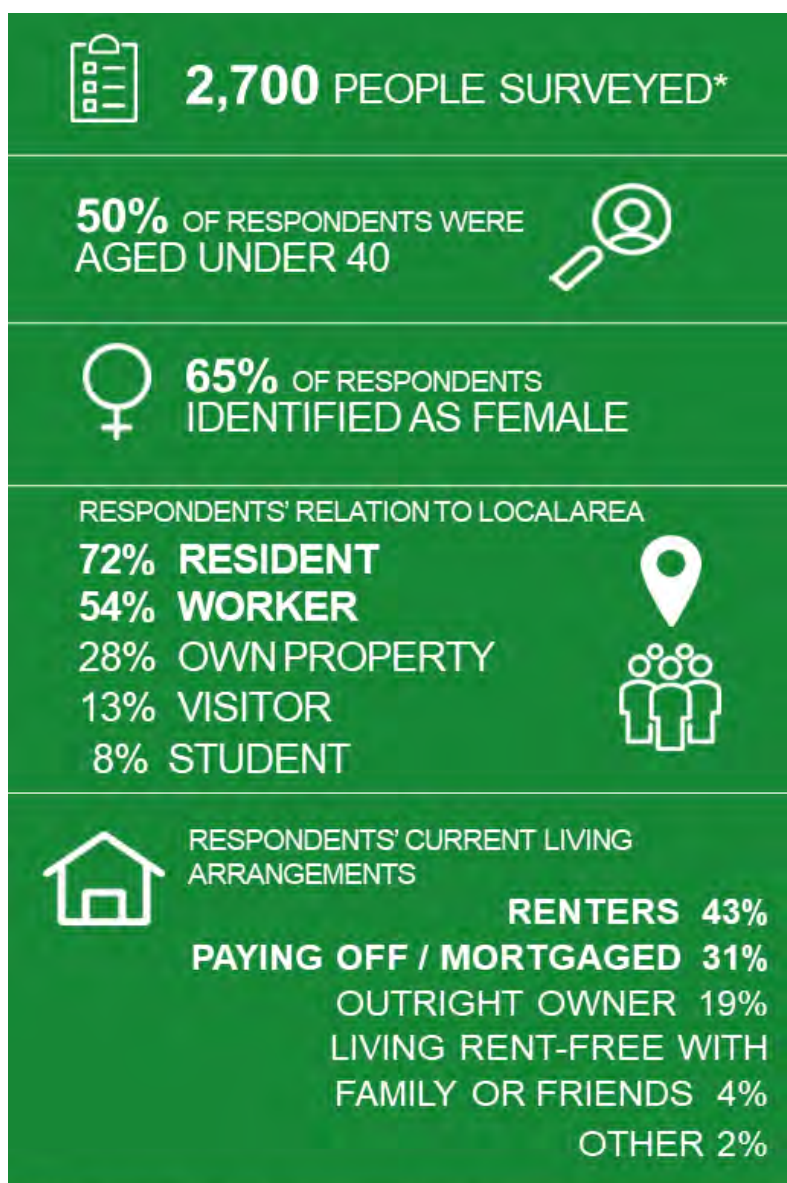
- Local businesses
- Tech start ups
- Inclusion (disability)

Community and business survey

An online survey for community and businesses was hosted by the City. The survey was designed to:

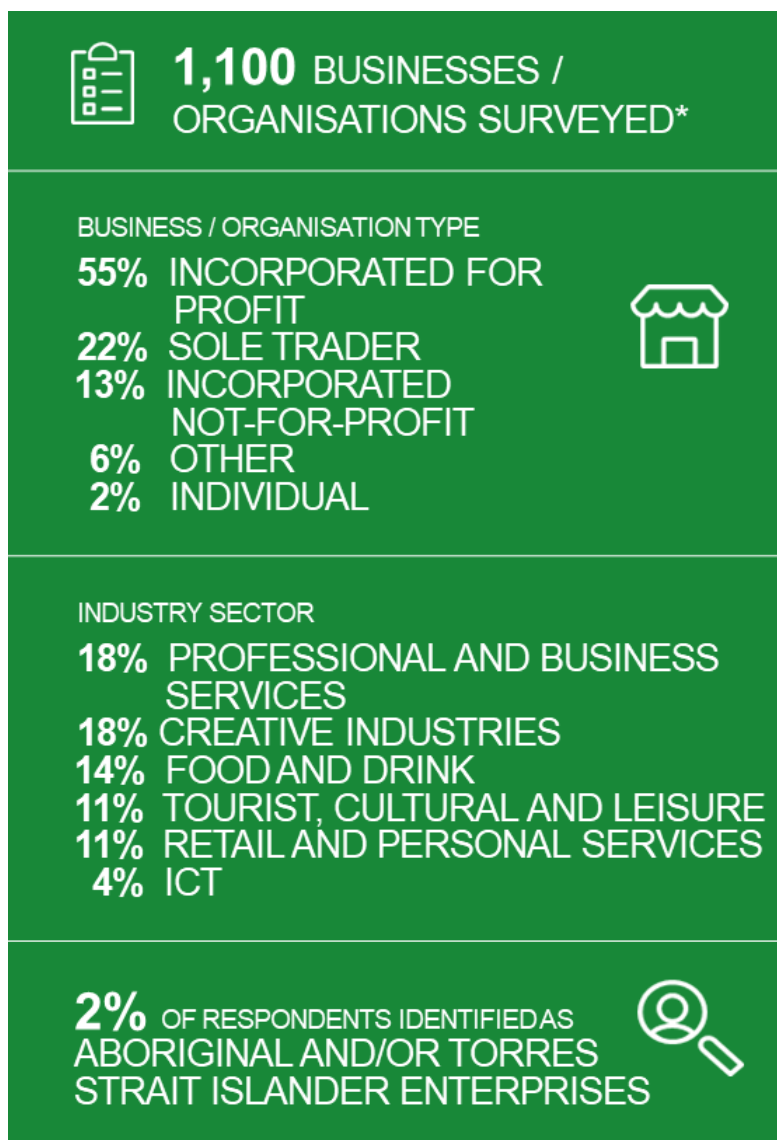
- understand the impacts of the pandemic on the City
- discover what people need to enable their recovery
- allow people to provide feedback on what they believed the City’s role should be during recovery
- understand future hope and concerns for Sydney

Community survey results



**533 respondents who completed the community survey also completed the business survey*

Business survey results



**533 respondents who completed the business survey also completed the community survey*

Engagement outcomes

Key insights emerged from the engagement in relation to the impacts of the pandemic, community needs, role of the City during recovery and opportunities & concerns for the future.

The outcomes from these insights have been used to inform the City’s Community Recovery Plan.

The impact of the pandemic

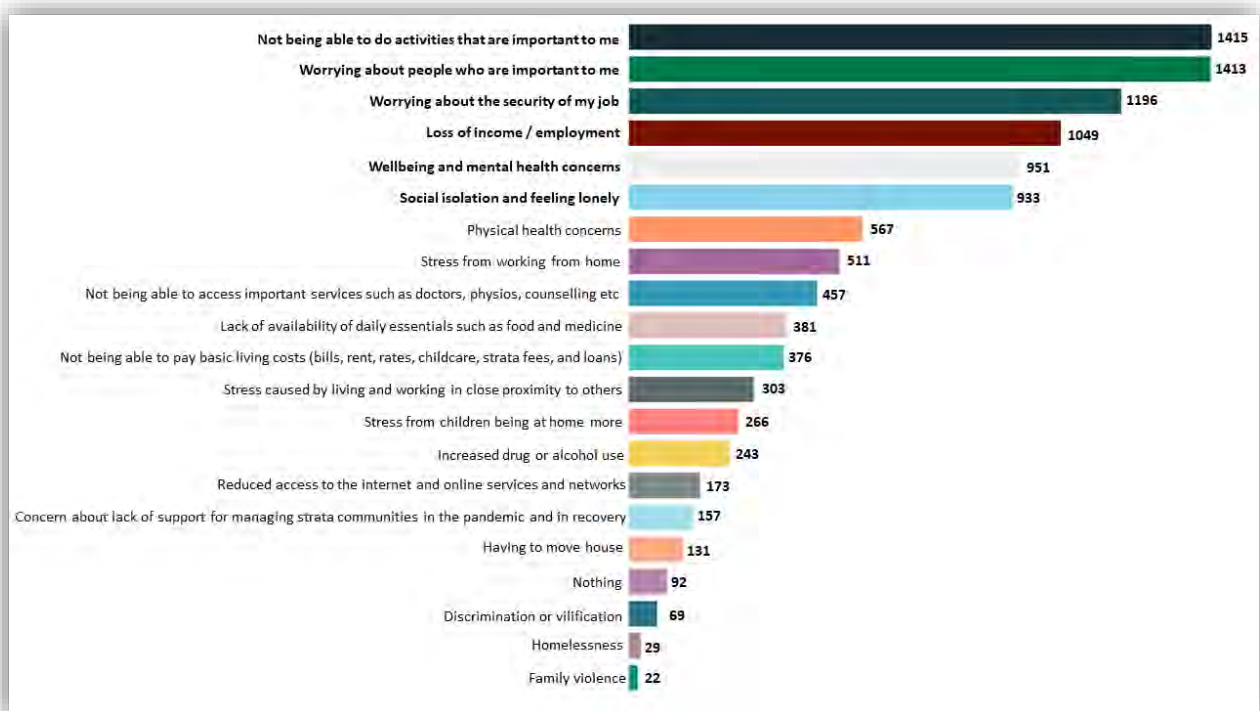
The impact of the pandemic was widespread, affecting many parts of our communities.

Of the people surveyed via the City’s online survey:

- Over half are worried about people who are important to them.
- Over half have not been able to do activities important to them, such as visiting friends or family, going out to cafes and restaurants and cultural activities (cinemas, galleries).
- A third have felt lonely or have mental health and wellbeing concerns.
- About 40% have lost jobs or reduced income and as many are worried about job security.
- 15% encountered lack of availability of essentials such as food and medicine.

Housing costs and household bills are the most common costs respondents are not able to afford. About 5% of respondents have had to move to a new house.

Other than experiencing housing stress, the restrictions and financial worries have meant that close to 1 in 5 have not been able to access important services (doctors, counselling).



This graph shows the results from the community, when asked how the Covid-19 pandemic affected them.

The community sector raised concerns for non-citizens including asylum seekers and international students. Food security for these most vulnerable community members will continue to be a concern.

77% of businesses surveyed had reduced staffing levels during Covid-19. Nearly 9 in 10 businesses survey responses have experienced a reduction in turnover or cash flow as a result of the restrictions.

Government regulations have had a high impact on 59% of businesses surveyed, while 17% reported some impact and 9% reported low impact on their operations. 20% of businesses surveyed had to temporarily close, while 1% had permanently closed due to the impacts of the pandemic. Main reasons for closures are;

- government regulations
- loss of revenue
- lack of demand for their product
- forced closure
- health and safety risks.

In order to remain open, businesses have changed the way they operate. Over half changed their product / service and their delivery model.

Business representatives told us that they were also impacted by the loss of foot traffic from visitors, workers and students. This had a greater impact on areas that heavily rely on these customer bases such as the CBD, the Rocks and Haymarket.

The impact on the creative and cultural sector has been devastating. Some organisations have seen losses in the excess of \$50 million, stood down 80% of staff and a significant amount of their workforce are not eligible for JobKeeper. Individual artists and sole traders were also identified as particularly vulnerable.

Needs for recovery

The community told us they need **accurate information** to help build confidence about when it is safe to return to their normal activities. 68% of people surveyed said that clear communications from the City are very important. Accessible communication was identified as very important including using different formats and channels (phone, easy-read English, large-print versions, accessible websites, captioning and AUSLAN).

Business representatives also told us that to sustainably reopen and operate safely they needed **reliable and timely information**. Poorly communicated regulations left businesses feeling confused about how to safely operate and what support was available to them. Only 32% of businesses surveyed said they completely understood what support was available to them from the Federal Government.

When asked how soon they'd feel comfortable and safe to return to activities in Sydney once level 3 restrictions were in place, it was clear that people need to **feel safe and confident to return**, even if restrictions are lifted. Whilst 65% of people would immediately use open spaces and public parks, only 33% would immediately feel safe to use public transport and 30% to return to work in an office.

Whilst 3 of the top 5 mentioned activities that community were not able to do were related to cultural participation (cinema, galleries & museums, live performances etc.), over a third of the respondents said it would be several months before they would hire an indoor space for a community activity (33%) or participate in indoor cultural and community events (38%).

The business and creative community told us they need the **City to be clean, safe and accessible**. This will built confidence for people and audiences to return to their regular activities and to support businesses.

Business representatives and respondents to the business survey indicated they need:

- immediate clarity in relation to how to safety operate their businesses, this will enable them to plan for their staffing, program and supplier needs.
- financial support, especially in regards to cash flow.
- marketing and promotions support.
- clear and ongoing communications of support available to businesses.
- flexible regulations that consider the location and size of their businesses.

People (business, the cultural community and local residents) liked the idea of a **community celebration** as an important step in Sydney’s recovery. They proposed various approaches on the same theme – a summer of culture in Sydney, a one-day celebration inviting people into the city, neighbourhood block BBQs and village business weekend showcases.

The role the City should play in recovery

When asked how the City should support recovery the following were identified as very important:

%	Actions
74%	supports vulnerable people
68%	provides clear communications on changes
62%	supports local businesses
60%	leads public health adaptations / assist community to do the same
57%	advocates to state and federal governments for better services (eg housing)
56%	supports the arts and cultural sector
31%	opens facilities, such as libraries, pools and community centres
29%	makes it easier for business to get approvals

Both business representatives and respondents to the business survey said that the most useful areas the City of Sydney can assist the business community recover were:

- Financial support: including reduction of fees and charges, grants and sponsorship.
- Marketing and promotion: including shop local campaigns that target local and regional visitors and promote the City’s fine grain main street with safety messages.
- Events, precinct activation and place planning activities: that would allow local businesses and cultural providers to use safe public spaces for events and trading.
- Advocate for further business support across all sectors of Government
- Upskilling in e-commerce

Concerns for Sydney’s future

There was increasing concern about the impacts on the economy when the Federal Government’s support package ends in September. There is growing concern for the sustainability of the NGO sector who have work tirelessly to support the most vulnerable members of the community especially in the face of more financial stress on people resulting from cut-backs to JobKeeper and JobSeeker payments.

The business community is concerned that Sydney will find it harder to recover than other cities due to its unique position in the nation’s economy and especially in relation to international tourism, creative and cultural offerings, international students, nightlife and retail sectors who have all been heavily impacted by the pandemic.

When we asked people about their greatest concerns for Sydney’s future in March 2019, their top concerns were traffic congestion and inadequate public transport, followed by lack of affordable housing and loss of places for entertainment and cultural expression.

In 2020, the top concerns are now traffic congestion and inadequate public transport followed by impacts from climate change, lack of affordable housing and loss of places for entertainment and cultural expression. More people are also now concerned about being prepared for a major emergency event than in 2019.

March 2019	May 2020
1. Traffic congestion and inadequate public transport	1. Traffic congestion and inadequate public transport (64% of respondents)
2. Lack of affordable housing	2. Impacts of climate change including heatwaves and storms (58%) - shifted up within top 10
3. Loss of places for entertainment, going out and cultural expression	3. Lack of affordable housing (57%)
4. Lack of parks, trees, green and recreation spaces	4. Loss of places for entertainment, going out and cultural expression (47%)
5. Impacts of climate change including heatwaves and storms	5. Loss of local character and heritage (46%) - shifted up within top 10
6. Loss of local character and heritage	6. Loss of local businesses and services (46%) - new concern added to survey due to Covid-19
7. Lack of transparency in government	7. Lack of parks, trees, green and recreation spaces (43%)
8. Social disconnection and the loss of community	8. Financial hardship and unemployment (40%) - new concern added to survey due to Covid-19
9. Increasing intolerance and social exclusion	9. Not being prepared for a major emergency event in Sydney (40%) - new to top 10
10. Too much population growth and development	10. Lack of transparency in government (40%)

This table shows the results of people’s greatest concerns for Sydney’s future in March 2019 and again in May 2020.

Opportunities for Sydney's future

The pandemic has provided the opportunity to rethink how life can be in Sydney in the future.

Some positive impacts from the pandemic included flexible working arrangements (50%) more time with family (50%), acts of kindness (40%). People referred to a renewed sense of **working together** and that there was greater awareness of the needs and experiences of different people within our communities. People were pleased to see action on long-term issues of concern such as providing housing to people sleeping rough and expressed hope that this would continue.

The community deeply **valued public open space** during the pandemic. It has acted as a trigger to rethink how we use public space and make more space available for walking, cycling, meeting up and cultural and community events. Using public outdoor space was identified by arts organisations and businesses as an alternative to indoor venues and a way to build confidence and bring people back.

“Becoming more European in our lifestyle- option of eating and drinking later, spreading out on footpaths and roads, courtyards -alfresco dining. Not constant layers of compliance for selling alcohol and opening late. Sydney needs to be a 'global city'”

Working from home has also proved to create opportunities for workers to have more time with family, spend more in their local main streets and commute less.

“I'm hoping more people will have the opportunity to work flexibly from home. Just think, if every full time worker worked from home one day per week, this would result in 20% less traffic on our roads & 20% less commuters using public transport. The resulting effect would mean less pressure on our public transport network, greater hygiene through social distancing brought about by less commuters, workers who are less stressed, financial savings on fares & fuel & ultimately a cleaner, greener city.”

Throughout the roundtables and workshops community and business representatives discussed their aspirations to be continue to **collaborate** with other businesses, communities and government to plan for recovery.

“This is a time for adaptation and innovation. An opportunity to partner with game changers. The City can help by streamlining approvals, fee concessions, engaging with local business, property and home owners who are willing to personally invest in development, growth and green spaces”

Stakeholder surveys review

The City reviewed and compared its consultation results with research provided by community and business stakeholders. This review of 12 pieces of research was performed to test whether the City's engagement outcomes aligned with feedback and insights from other concurrent research.

Sectors covered by the provided research included:

- Fashion
- Community
- Waterloo residents and social housing tenants
- Cultural and creative
- NSW residents

Community Recovery Plan – Community Engagement Report

- Night time economy
- Arts and cultural events
- Apartment residents, strata committees
- Road commuters and public transport users
- People with disability

The research results generally aligned with the feedback received during the consultation activities. Key highlights and commonalities from across the research included:

Concerns

- Financial strains
- Digital access
- Economic recovery
- Mental health, especially for younger people and women
- Feelings of isolation
- Food shortages
- Impacts on the cultural sector, especially in relation to employment
- Impacts on travel and movement

Needs

- Clear communications on how to remain and operate safely
- Support for local businesses
- Building audience confidence to return to cultural and outdoor activities
- A clean city to create community confidence
- More environmentally sustainable initiatives to support recovery

Opportunities

- Creation of new digital practices and e-commerce
- Greater collaboration between suppliers and businesses to create sustainable practices
- Greater appreciation for public open space and local offerings
- More flexible work life balance

Across the research pieces the City of Sydney's unique role in recovery stood out in relation to:

- growing concern about loss of places for entertainment and going out
- growing concern about congestion and lack of public transport
- strong support for council helping vulnerable people and the arts.

Research sources are listed in Appendices 2.

Other feedback and insights

Additional comments and insights provided during the consultation via submissions, social media posts and comments made in the survey.

Key insights included:

- The act of asking the community was **greatly appreciated** and contributed to the high level of trust between the community and the City.
- The **community wants to be involved** in the City’s recovery. Community, businesses and stakeholders were willing to share their knowledge and insights, and in turn would appreciate the City sharing its data and plans. There is a genuine want to collaborate, across a variety of sectors, for the betterment of the City.
- Concerns were raised that the recovery efforts were **primarily economic focused**. This raised fears that more public space will be allocated for private economic purposes and its impact on resident’s use of available public spaces.
- There was a strong call for **sustained support for the creative sector**, beyond just recovery. It was identified that this sector was already struggling before the pandemic and there are fears many providers within the sector will not survive.

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Community and business survey results
- Appendix 2: Lord Mayor roundtables and online workshops summary
- Appendix 3: Stakeholder surveys and written submissions
- Appendix 4: Activities to promote the consultation

