

Productivity and Improvement Plan



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Introduction

North Sydney Council has faced increasing financial pressure in recent years due to external shocks such as COVID-19 and extreme weather events, high inflation rates, revenue losses, large infrastructure projects and comparatively low rates. Without intervention, these pressures pose a risk to financial sustainability.

In 2023 Council embarked on an ambitious improvement journey that includes an ongoing commitment to increasing productivity and effectiveness through targeted projects and initiatives. This journey has resulted in a significant productivity saving to date, and further savings are projected for future years. However, even with these savings, the funding gap is projected to increase without a Special Variation (SV) to rating increase.

This Organisational Productivity and Improvement Plan highlights the key productivity achievements to date and details planned improvement activities. It demonstrates to the community, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) and the Office of Local Government that Council has made sustained efforts to minimise the impact of an SV on the community through internal productivity reforms.

What is productivity?

The Productivity Commission of Australia defines productivity primarily as the output produced per unit of input. According to the Commission, productivity is not about working harder or longer, but about working smarter – that is, using resources more efficiently. It also highlights that improvements in productivity are the key long-term driver of economic growth.

In the local government context, productivity refers to how efficiently resources are used to deliver services and achieve positive community outcomes. Inputs include staff time, operating budgets, plant and equipment, materials and technology. Outputs are the tangible services provided – such as waste collection, community programs, development approvals, infrastructure maintenance and renewal, and support provided to residents. Outcomes, while harder to measure, include community wellbeing, satisfaction, safety and environmental quality.

This plan measures productivity and financial improvement through direct cost savings, cost containment and additional revenue. It also considers efficiency gains, customer service improvements and risk management.

Background

North Sydney Council's (NSC's) overarching performance management framework has customer experience at its centre and consists of three separate frameworks that work together to sustainably deliver projects and services for the community.

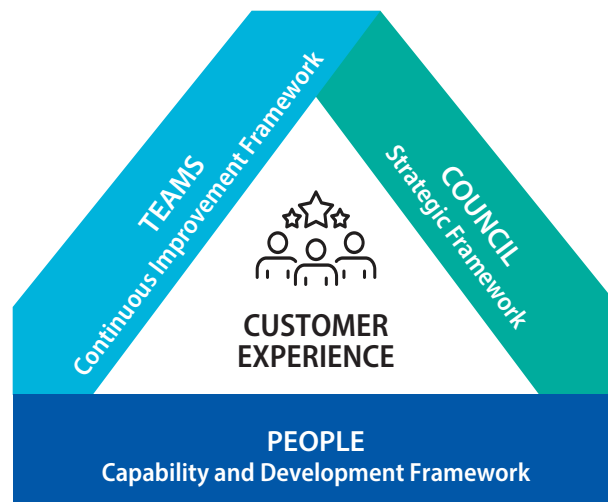


Figure 1: Performance Management Framework

Strategic Framework

This framework focuses on identifying community needs. It is centred around community engagement and uses Informing Strategies to link community priorities with NSC's actions.

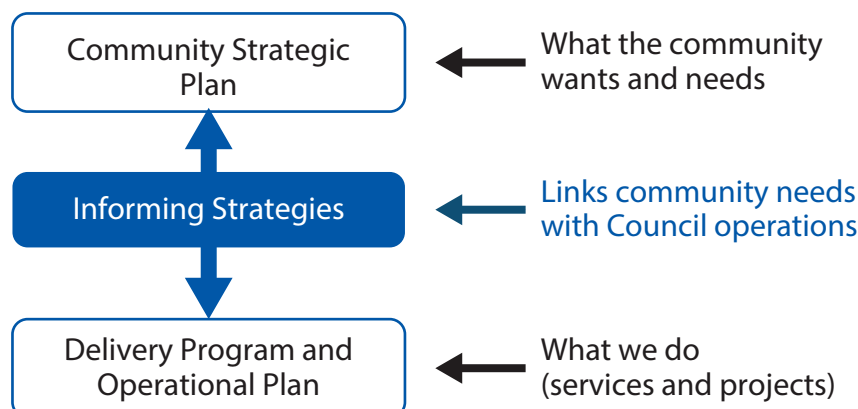


Figure 2: Informing Strategies

The Informing Strategies and new suite of Integrated Planning and Reporting documents were prepared and subsequently adopted in 2024/25.

Continuous Improvement Framework

This framework focuses on how each service unit plans to deliver NSC's strategic goals and achieve continuous improvement. This includes development of service unit plans as well as implementation of the Service Review Program and Process Improvement Program.

NSC's Process Improvement Program involves mapping and subsequent analysis of service procedures to identify and address inefficiencies and customer pain points.

Capability and Development Framework

This framework focuses on how each staff member supports the delivery of service unit and strategic goals

While this Organisational Productivity and Improvement Plan is primarily focused on implementation of the Continuous Improvement Framework, delivery across all three frameworks is essential to support a productive workforce that is focused on delivering outcomes wanted and needed by our community.

About this plan

This Organisational Productivity and Improvement Plan provides an update on Council's progress in implementing improvement actions and quantifies the savings across the organisation.

Every service unit within Council has contributed to the development of this Plan, reflecting the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement and a constructive collaborative culture.

The plan is divided into two parts:

Part 1: Productivity gains

Part 1 summarises key performance improvement outputs delivered over the past three years including cost savings, additional revenue, cost containment and efficiency gains. These are defined below:

- **Cost savings**

Reductions in Council's expenditure. These occur when less money is required to provide services, deliver projects or run operations.

- **Additional revenue**

New or increased income streams that expand Council's funding base beyond its regular sources. This can include additional income through user fees and charges, fines, and/or new commercial activities. Unlike savings, which focus on reducing costs, additional revenue directly increases the funds available to support Council's activities. While not all additional revenue is the direct result of productivity improvements, it is an important part of improving financial sustainability so has been included.

- **Cost containment**

Expenditure that Council would have incurred if a proactive initiative had not been undertaken. Cost containment is typically achieved through:

- Avoided costs: expenses prevented through negotiation, innovation or completing work in-house.
- Recovered costs: revenue previously lost but subsequently reclaimed.
- Redirected savings: financial savings reinvested into business improvements.

In essence, cost containment represents money Council did not need to spend because of proactive initiatives. Without these measures, Council would have been required to increase rates to fund the additional expenditure.

- **Efficiency gains**

Time saved through process improvements and reinvested into higher value activities to support ongoing improvements, reduce risks, improve customer experience, and deliver better data and reporting to support decision-making. These activities are essential for the long-term sustainability of Council.

Productivity savings and additional revenue can be one-off or recurring (ongoing).

Part 2: Productivity actions

Part 2 outlines the specific actions, process changes and initiatives that have contributed to delivering the productivity gains. Actions and initiatives are grouped into the following categories:

- **Workforce management**

An organisational realignment in 2023/24 streamlined leadership, improved resource allocation and delivered enduring productivity and financial benefits. In 2024/25, vacancy holds and active leave management provided a one-off saving in employee costs to support short-term liquidity and budget pressures.

- **Service review program**

In 2024/25 Council introduced a Service Review Framework to guide the systematic assessment of services against community needs, strategic priorities, and value for money. The framework embeds continuous improvement and delivers benefits in staff capability, efficiency, customer experience, financial sustainability, and environmental performance. Reviews of the following service areas were completed in 2024/25:

- Customer Service
- Development Services
- Street Cleaning (this was the pilot of the new Service Review Framework)

- **Continuous improvement initiatives (including process mapping and improvements)**

In 2024/25 Council advanced its continuous improvement program, which embeds a culture of innovation, efficiency and accountability across the organisation. The program included process mapping of more than 270 workflows alongside initiatives that delivered productivity gains through:

- Building internal capability
- Changed format of service delivery
- Cost avoidance
- Enhanced procurement and contract management
- Revenue initiatives
- Technology improvements
- Workforce optimisation
- Quality assurance
- Online customer service improvements
- Process improvement
- Digitisation and automation
- Rostering/scheduling adjustments

A description of each continuous improvement area, together with specific examples, is provided in part 2.3.

PART 1

PRODUCTIVITY GAINS

Over the past three years, Council has implemented a range of initiatives that have delivered and/or will deliver productivity savings and/or additional revenue. Further initiatives are also planned for implementation in 2026/27.

This part is divided into three sections:

1. Past and current productivity gains
2. Future productivity gains
3. Outcomes delivered through productivity gains

1.1 Past and current productivity gains

The following tables summarise the estimated savings and additional revenue from improvement initiatives implemented in the past three years or currently underway. Examples of the specific actions included under each category are provided in Part 2.3.1.

Operational cost savings and **additional revenue** highlighted in orange in the tables below have been included in the 2026–36 Long-Term Financial Plan forecasts.

Cost containment figures represent the expenditure that Council has avoided through proactive initiatives. These are not shown as a reduction in the budget, but if the initiatives had not been implemented, additional costs would have been incurred, and Council would have been required to increase rates to fund the additional expenditure.

Table 1: Ongoing productivity gains (2023/24 – 2025/26)

Initiative	Cost savings (\$/year)	Additional revenue (\$/year)	Cost containment (\$/year)	Efficiency gains (hrs/year)
Workforce management				
Workforce management	-	-	2,300,000	-
Service reviews				
Street cleaning service review	13,200	-	-	4,194
Customer service review	206,248	-	-	7,036
Development services review	-	-	-	2,550
Continuous improvement				
Building internal capability	496,500	-	71,450	70
Changed format of service delivery	34,700	-	-	70
Cost avoidance	62,900	-	113,100	360
Enhanced procurement and contract management	218,290	200,000	667,259	1,473
Revenue initiatives	-	820,708	46,000	1,000
Technology improvements	648,895	-	197,107	3,388
Workforce optimisation	309,551	-	-	176
Quality assurance	-	-	-	882
Online customer service improvements	-	-	-	1,127
Process improvement	1,992	40,000	310,000	5,178
Digitisation and automation	-	-	-	7,619
Rostering/scheduling adjustments	12,000	631,000	32,000	0
TOTAL	2,004,276	1,691,708	3,736,916	35,122
Amount absorbed in 2024/25 budget	815,679	40,000		
Amount included in 2025/26 budget	1,188,597	1,651,708		

Table 2: One-off productivity gains (2023/24 – 2025/26)

Initiative	Cost savings (\$ one-off)	Additional revenue (\$ one-off)	Cost containment (\$ one-off capital)	Cost containment (\$ one-off)
Vacant positions/employee cost savings (2024/25)	2,228,000	-	-	-
Vacant positions/employee cost savings (2025/26)	514,000	-	-	-
Reduction in materials and services (2024/25)	2,204,000	-	-	-
Building internal capability	-	-	-	500,000
Cost avoidance	317,755	-	450,000	-
Enhanced procurement and contract management	-	-	-	92,000
Revenue initiatives	-	200,000	-	271,000
TOTAL	5,263,755	200,000	450,000	863,000
Amount absorbed in 2024/25 budget	4,432,000	200,000		
Amount included in 2025/26 budget	831,755	-		

1.2 Future productivity gains

In addition to the improvement initiatives already implemented or underway in 2025/26, a number of future actions are also planned for implementation in 2026/27 onwards.

The savings and additional revenue forecast from these actions is summarised in the table below. Examples of the specific improvement initiatives included under each category are provided in Part 2.3.2.

Table 3: Ongoing productivity gains included in 2026/27 budget

Initiative	Cost savings (\$/year)	Additional revenue (\$/year)	Cost containment (\$/year)	Efficiency gains (hrs/year)
Service reviews				
Street cleaning service review	386,800	-	-	80
Continuous improvement		-		
Building internal capability	408,000	-	-	70
Changed format of service delivery	-	-	-	441
Cost avoidance	69,070	-	-	-
Enhanced procurement and contract management	3,000	-	-	150
Revenue initiatives	-	852,700	40,000	-
Technology improvements	-	-	9,000	3,204
Workforce optimisation	-	-	-	-
Quality assurance	-	-	-	100
Online customer service improvements	-	-	-	1,702
Process improvement	-	-	-	2,725
Digitisation and automation	-	-	-	2,747
Rostering/scheduling adjustments	1,560	108,000	-	3,900
TOTAL	868,430	960,700	49,000	15,119
Amount included in 2026/27 budget	868,430	960,700		

1.3 Outcomes delivered through productivity gains

This section summarises the benefits delivered through the productivity savings and additional revenue.

1.3.1 Direct financial savings

Over the next 10 years, it is anticipated that productivity and improvement actions undertaken by Council will result in more than \$52 million in cumulative savings and additional income. Table 4 on the following page details these savings, which include:

- \$23 million in reduced expenditure, including employee benefits and on-costs, materials and services, and other expenses.
- \$29 million in increased income, including user fees and charges and other revenue sources. This increase does not include additional revenue from the sale of naming rights of the North Sydney Olympic Pool or North Sydney Oval. The income from this initiative will be determined through commercial negotiations.

This reduced expenditure and increased income has been included in the 2026–2036 Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP). In addition to direct operational savings included in the LTFP, ongoing cost containment measures of more than \$3.7 million per year (or \$43 million over the next ten years assuming 3% indexation) have been identified, along with a one-off cost containment of approximately \$0.8 million in 2024/25. These figures represent expenditure that has been avoided.

While cost containment figures do not appear as reductions in the budget, they reflect costs that would otherwise have been incurred and would have required higher rates to fund.

Together, productivity and improvement gains – including reduced expenditure, increased income, and cost containment initiatives– have lowered the required rate rise by a cumulative 14.9% over the three-year SV period.

Table 4: Cumulative savings and additional income from performance improvement initiatives

Category	2025/26 – Adopted Budget (\$)	2026/27 (\$)	2027/28 (\$)	2028/29 (\$)	2029/30 (\$)	2030/31 (\$)	2031/32 (\$)	2032/33 (\$)	2033/34 (\$)	2034/35 (\$)	2035/36 (\$)	TOTAL – 10Y (\$)
Service Review Program												
Street cleaning service review	-13,200	-400,330	-410,338	-420,597	-431,112	-441,889	-452,937	-464,260	-475,867	-487,763	-499,957	-4,485,050
Customer service review	-190,384	-195,144	-200,022	-205,023	-210,148	-215,402	-220,787	-226,307	-231,964	-237,764	-243,708	-2,186,268
Continuous Improvement Program												
Building internal capability	-496,500	-904,613	-927,228	-950,409	-974,169	-998,523	-1,023,486	-1,049,073	-1,075,300	-1,102,182	-1,129,737	-10,134,719
Changed format of service delivery	-34,700	-35,568	-36,457	-37,368	-38,302	-39,260	-40,241	-41,247	-42,279	-43,336	-44,419	-398,476
Cost avoidance	-380,655	-130,791	-134,061	-137,413	-140,848	-144,369	-147,978	-151,678	-155,470	-159,356	-163,340	-1,465,304
Enhanced procurement and contract management	-34,875	-38,747	-39,716	-40,708	-41,726	-42,769	-43,839	-44,934	-46,058	-47,209	-48,390	-434,096
Revenue initiatives	200,000	205,000	210,125	215,378	220,763	226,282	231,939	237,737	243,681	249,773	256,017	2,296,693
Revenue initiatives	780,708	1,641,538	1,682,577	1,724,641	1,767,757	1,811,951	1,857,250	1,903,681	1,951,273	2,000,055	2,050,056	18,390,779
Technology improvements	-47,725	-48,918	-50,141	-51,395	-52,679	-53,996	-55,346	-56,730	-58,148	-59,602	-61,092	-548,048
Workforce optimisation	-808,321	-301,679	-309,221	-316,952	-324,875	-332,997	-341,322	-349,855	-358,602	-367,567	-376,756	-3,379,825
Process improvement	-1,992	-2,042	-2,093	-2,145	-2,199	-2,254	-2,310	-2,368	-2,427	-2,488	-2,550	-22,875
Process improvement	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	40,000	31,000	31,000	31,000	31,000	31,000	31,000	346,000
Rostering/scheduling adjustments	-12,000	-13,860	-14,207	-14,562	-14,926	-15,299	-15,681	-16,073	-16,475	-16,887	-17,309	-155,279
Rostering/scheduling adjustments	631,000	739,000	757,475	776,412	795,822	815,718	836,111	857,013	878,439	900,400	922,910	8,279,299
SUBTOTAL	-2,020,352	-2,071,691	-2,123,483	-2,176,570	-2,230,984	-2,286,759	-2,343,928	-2,402,526	-2,462,589	-2,524,154	-2,587,258	-23,209,942
SUBTOTAL	1,651,708	2,625,538	2,690,177	2,756,431	2,824,342	2,884,950	2,956,299	3,029,432	3,104,392	3,181,227	3,259,983	29,312,772
TOTAL	3,672,060	4,697,229	4,813,660	4,933,001	5,055,326	5,171,709	5,300,227	5,431,958	5,566,982	5,705,381	5,847,241	52,522,713

1.3.2 Increased organisational capacity

Combined estimated efficiency gains of more 35,000 hours per year have been identified through past and current productivity improvements. This number is forecast to increase to over 50,000 hours each year (or approximately 2.3 hours per week per employee) from 2026/27 onwards.

Time savings gained through continuous improvement initiatives have been and will continue to be reinvested to meet the needs of a growing population and enable higher-value activities to be undertaken that strengthen risk management, improve customer experience, and enhance data and reporting to support better decision-making. Collectively, these efforts underpin the long-term sustainability of Council.

Moving forward, the efficiency gains will also assist Council to absorb the additional overheads (financial, human resources, technology, and governance) associated with onboarding a new service unit to operate the North Sydney Olympic Pool. This expansion includes the integration of 40 new staff and the associated increase in transactions and governance requirements.

1.3.3 Risk reductions

Council has reduced risks across finance, workforce, operations, technology and community safety through stronger governance, digitisation and process improvements. These steps lower exposure to financial loss, service disruption, compliance breaches and reputational damage. However, outdated systems still constrain many benefits, underscoring the need for continued investment to fully embed resilience and reliability.

Some of the risk reductions delivered through the actions detailed in part 2 are highlighted below:

Finance

- Reduced risk of missed or late payments, debts or invoice errors through automated reminders and streamlined financial controls.
- Improved financial accountability, inventory accuracy and contractual certainty, lowering legal and reputational exposure.
- Reduced risk of over- or under-spending via improved budget visibility and reporting.
- Stronger financial sustainability by ensuring contributions, fees and charges are properly collected.

WHS / safety

- Lowered work health and safety (WHS) risks by reducing manual handling and repetitive administrative tasks.
- Improved hazard identification and incident tracking, ensuring quicker resolution and stronger compliance with safety obligations.

Workforce and leadership

- Clearer accountabilities and stronger performance management reduce industrial and employee relations risks.
- Improved onboarding, training and leadership development lower risks of turnover, disengagement and burnout.
- Building internal capacity reduces reliance on external expertise.

Environmental

- Reduced environmental risks through proactive audits and pollution prevention.
- Reduced environmental impacts of operations, including fuel consumption, emissions and waste, through more efficient practices.

Reputation

- Reduced reputational damage through clearer communication, more consistent public information and stronger transparency.
- Reduced reputational risk from poor customer experiences by digitising services and providing faster, more reliable responses.

Legal liability

- Lowered legal exposure through accurate, standardised documentation (DA conditions, permits, contracts, etc.).
- Reduced risks of appeals or disputes (e.g., planning decisions, fire safety orders, compliance notices) through clearer processes and stronger enforcement.

Business activities (assets and infrastructure)

- Reduced outages and downtime risks via upgraded infrastructure, modern firewalls and proactive monitoring.
- Improved project planning and capital works prioritisation, reducing the risk of abortive or delayed projects.
- Stronger contract management and procurement practices reducing the risk of inconsistent or costly outcomes.

Community / public health and safety

- Improved community safety through stronger food safety, fire safety and playground inspection processes.
- Safer public spaces through proactive road, tree and infrastructure maintenance.

Information management and technology

- Lowered exposure to cyberattacks, phishing and insider threats through improved security operations, automated patching and continuous monitoring.
- Reduced risk of outdated systems, data loss, or incomplete recovery through SaaS migrations, cloud-based backups and digitisation of records.
- Strengthened data privacy protections by reducing manual handling.

1.3.4 Council-wide customer service improvements

Council has significantly enhanced customer service through digitisation, process improvements and better communication. These actions have reduced delays, improved responsiveness and delivered clearer, more reliable interactions for residents, businesses and internal stakeholders. While progress has been strong, some improvements remain dependent on upgrading older systems to ensure consistency and reliability.

Some of the customer service improvements delivered through the actions detailed in part 2 are highlighted below:

Faster, more reliable services

- Quicker turnaround for applications, certificates and permits through online systems and automated workflows.
- More reliable access to key services (e.g., car parks, DA tracking, bookings) due to modernised infrastructure and fewer network outages.
- Reduced delays in correspondence and payments, ensuring suppliers, applicants and ratepayers experience more timely, accurate service.

Improved communication and transparency

- Clearer, more consistent customer communications, including invoices, rate notices and DA conditions.
- Progress towards real-time updates for development applications, certificates and service requests.

Greater convenience and access

- Expanded online services (applications, forms, payments) provide 24/7 access from any device.
- Digital payments reduce wait times and improve convenience for customers.
- Self-service options, such as web chat and dashboards, reduce call volumes and complaints.

Enhanced trust and confidence

- Improved cyber security and data protection increase public confidence that information and transactions are safe.
- Proactive maintenance and inspections reinforce community trust in Council's commitment to safety and service quality.

This part outlines the specific initiatives that have contributed to delivering the productivity savings and additional revenue under each category:

1. Workforce management
2. Service reviews
3. Continuous improvement initiatives (including process mapping and improvements)

Except for short-term measures implemented to address liquidity, such as holding vacant positions and changing community centre grant funding arrangements, the initiatives are focused on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Council to ensure we can best meet the needs of the community now and for years to come.

2.1 Workforce management review 2023/24 – 2024/25

In early 2023, Council commenced a comprehensive review of its operating model to streamline leadership, strengthen frontline services and align resources with areas of greatest need.

The review reduced the number of senior leadership positions, with Directors reduced from six to three (halving the Tier 2 structure) and service units created to simplify and rebalance the Tier 3 structure. This realignment released approximately \$2.3 million in funding to address critical gaps that would otherwise have required support from rates through the Special Variation (SV). Importantly, the long-term value of this change – through reduced risk, improved governance and productivity gains – extends well beyond the financial figure.

We are seeing the benefits of this change, including the following productivity benefits:

- *Senior management cost containment:* The realignment of the organisation structure has reduced senior management level costs, while maintaining and/or enhancing productivity.
- *Organisational Performance and business process staffing:* These staff have overseen the development of Council's new strategic planning framework and developed and implemented improvement frameworks, which in turn have resulted in further productivity improvements. Without these resources, significant funding would have been required for consultants and/or the organisation improvement would not have occurred.
- *Strengthened financial management and reporting:* Prior to the review, Council was unable to finalise its 2022/23 financial statements on time due to poorly configured systems, limited reporting capability and broader financial challenges. The inclusion of a Chief Financial Officer within the organisation structure has allowed for improved financial management and reporting. This has been critical due to liquidity and sustainability concerns, along with oversight of North Sydney Olympic Pool costs.
- *Building Compliance staffing:* An additional resource was allocated to building compliance due to the pressure placed on this team through high volumes of compliance issues. This resource has ensured Council's legislative requirements have been met and risks reduced, while at the same time improving customer response. Without these resources, funding would have been required for consultants and/or the improvement would not have occurred.
- *Risk management staffing:* A resource was allocated to manage Council's enterprise risk management function. Outside of senior staffing, there was no allocated risk management position to manage and monitor the risk function. Risk management is critical within local government, as highlighted through the North Sydney Olympic Pool project.
- *Parks and Gardens staffing:* Council's green network has expanded substantially in recent years without a proportionate increase in staffing. Additional resourcing has ensured service levels are maintained across the enlarged network.
- *Customer experience:* An additional resource was added to the customer service team to support review and improvement. This has resulted in new processes and systems which have already reduced inefficiencies and improved the overall customer experience.
- *Community capacity building:* An additional resource was allocated to the community development team to expand support for volunteering initiatives and strengthen local capacity.
- *Affordable housing:* An additional resource was temporarily allocated to the strategic planning team to develop an affordable housing scheme and improve opportunities for affordable housing in North Sydney. Without this internal capability, reliance on consultants would have been significantly higher.

In addition to the workforce realignment undertaken in 2023 (outlined above), Council delivered a one-off cost saving of \$2.2 million in 2024/25 by holding vacant positions for extended periods. This action was necessary to support short-term liquidity pressures but is not sustainable in the long term, as holding vacancies open increases workforce pressure, reduces service capacity and risks burnout among remaining staff. Prolonged vacancies can also delay projects, reduce responsiveness to the community and undermine the productivity gains achieved through the workforce review.

In 2024/25 Council also implemented a leave management initiative to reduce leave liabilities.

2.1.1 Workforce management summary

The following table summarises the productivity gains achieved through the workforce management review.

Organisational realignment	By reducing the spend on management level salaries, \$2.3 million was able to be saved and redirected to address critical gaps in areas of need including compliance, parks and gardens, sustainability, community development, organisational improvement, risk management, information technology and customer experience.	\$2.3 million/yr cost containment
Vacant positions	Council generated \$2.228 million in savings in 2024/25 by holding vacant positions for extended periods. Leaving positions vacant was necessary to support short-term liquidity pressures but is not sustainable in the long term.	\$2.2 million cost savings (2024/25)
Leave management initiative	Council implemented plans to reduce excess leave levels created over time. This created a saving of \$0.9 million through a reduction in leave liabilities.	\$0.9 million reduction in leave liabilities

2.2 Service review program (2024/25 onwards)

Council developed and subsequently implemented a Service Review Framework in 2024/25 to guide a systematic program of reviews across its services. The framework provides a structured, evidence-based approach to assessing the cost, quality, efficiency and effectiveness of services, ensuring they remain relevant, financially sustainable and aligned with community expectations and statutory obligations.

The framework embeds a culture of continuous improvement, encouraging staff to think critically and creatively about current and future needs. Benefits are delivered across five key areas:

- Learning and growth: building staff capability to deliver high-quality, cost-efficient services.
- Internal processes: maximising opportunities for innovation, streamlining procedures, and removing inefficiencies.
- Customer experience: ensuring services continue to meet community needs and expectations.
- Financial sustainability: improving value for money and ensuring long-term affordability of services.
- Environmental sustainability: minimising adverse environmental impacts of Council operations.

The service review program operates on a four-year cycle, with two to three reviews undertaken annually.

Reviews of Customer Service, Development Services and Street Cleaning Operations were undertaken in 2024/25. The Street Cleaning Service Review was the pilot review for the new Service Review Framework.

Reviews of Governance, Tree Management, and Traffic and Transport will be completed in 2026/27.

2.2.1 Customer Service Review

The Customer Service Review delivered substantial improvements to efficiency, governance, risk management and the customer experience. Key changes focused on process optimisation, workforce realignment, digitisation and technology upgrades. Collectively, these initiatives have reduced costs, freed up staff capacity, and improved the quality and timeliness of services to the community. Overall, more than 7,000 staff hours per year have been saved through automation, digitisation, and smarter ways of working.

Some of the already implemented improvements include:

- *Website and self-service improvements*
Redeveloped website content provided customers with clearer, more accessible information. This increased self-service, reduced call volumes and freed staff to manage more complex enquiries.
- *Streamlined licensing and permits*
Outdated, paper-based licensing and permit systems were consolidated into digital processes. This included a centralised application form, electronic registers, debtor management, and refreshed templates and training materials. These changes delivered direct annual savings through role disestablishment and reduced printing and postage costs.
- *Workforce optimisation*
Duplicate leadership roles were removed and departmental meetings, KPIs, recognition programs and a structured five-day training plan were introduced.
- *Multi-disciplinary team capability*
Staff were cross-trained across the call centre, front counters and administration. This allowed flexible rostering, improved productivity and greater resilience during peak demand, reducing downtime and lifting service responsiveness.
- *Technology upgrades*
A new Contact Centre Platform introduced skills-based call routing, faster onboarding and real-time after-call task completion. Automated Resident Data Reports and Address Comparison Reports reduced manual workload on annual parking permit audits, improving data integrity and compliance.
- *Online payments*
A secure online payment gateway was introduced, reducing cash handling, counter visits and staff processing time.
- *Digitisation*
Resident and Temporary Parking Permits were digitised, enabling online renewals and payments, removing printing and postage costs, and reducing administrative handling.

2.2.2 Development Services Review

The Development Services Review has delivered significant efficiency improvements, enhanced governance and measurable productivity gains. By digitising workflows, standardising templates, introducing triage and building internal capability, the review has improved consistency, transparency and turnaround times for applicants. The productivity benefits are substantial and already delivering faster outcomes for the community, including a >20% reduction in gross average assessment times (from 158 days in January 2025 to 125 days in June).

Some of the already implemented improvements include:

- *Application triage*
Introduced structured Development Application Triage meetings, ensuring consistent allocation, faster processing and reduced risk of inconsistent referrals.
- *Notification process*
Shifted from weekly batching to mid-week processing, cutting delays and enabling quicker determinations.
- *Notification signs*
Replaced single-use plastic boards with A3 paper signs featuring QR codes, lowering costs, improving sustainability and providing customers simple online access to DA information.
- *Delegations*
Expanded staff delegations for minor variations and appeals, reducing unnecessary referrals to the Planning Panel and speeding up decision-making.
- *Process mapping*
Documented and published priority processes, reducing training time, improving consistency, and supporting quicker onboarding of new staff.
- *Condition library*
Embedded standardised condition templates in the assessment system, reducing errors, improving clarity for applicants and strengthening legal defensibility.
- *Report and template updates*
Streamlined and standardised reports, making them clearer, more consistent and easier to understand for decision-makers and applicants.

- *Legal services reform*
Appointed an in-house planning law specialist, reducing reliance on external legal providers, cutting costs and improving management of appeals. The savings from this appointment are included under 'Building internal capability' in section 2.3.
- *Referral templates*
Introduced standardised internal referral templates, improving clarity, tracking and turnaround times while reducing duplicated effort.
- *Data and reporting*
Implemented real-time dashboards and Power BI reporting, giving managers and staff greater oversight of workloads, performance and decision timeframes.

2.2.3 Street Cleaning Service Review (pilot)

The Street Cleaning Service Review identified more than \$400,000 in annual savings, with full benefits expected from 2026/27. To date, several improvements have already been implemented, delivering immediate efficiencies, risk reduction and better customer outcomes. Early actions have realised \$13,200 per year in fuel and maintenance savings, alongside significant time efficiencies that are being reinvested into service delivery.

Some of the already implemented improvements include:

- *Bin location optimisation*
Public bin locations were reviewed, with underused ones removed and others relocated or mounted on poles to prevent theft or movement. This reduced wasted servicing time, improved efficiency, lowered workplace risks and ensured bins are now consistently available in accessible locations for customers.
- *Digitised reporting systems*
Paper-based reporting for sweeping and compactor operations was replaced with a web-based system. This modernised approach enables real-time reporting, accurate record-keeping and improved oversight.
- *Digital communication with operators*
iPads were installed in vehicles, removing the need for daily in-person meetings between supervisors and compactor operators.
- *Scheduled compactor collections*
Fixed daily schedules were introduced for compactor collections, reducing downtime for manual cleaning teams waiting for leaf litter collection. This improved efficiency has allowed crews to collect more litter with existing resources.
- *Consolidated compactor operations*
Compactor operations were reviewed and streamlined from three compactors in daily use with rotating staff to two compactors with full-time operators on fixed runs. This improved accountability and service consistency. The third compactor was removed from daily use and retained as a backup, reducing fuel and maintenance costs, with further savings expected from its disposal in one to two years.

2.2.4 Service review summary

The following table summarises the productivity gains identified through service reviews in 2024/25.

Street Cleaning	The Street Cleaning service review identified annual savings of more than \$400,000 through operational efficiency improvements. Implementation of the recommendations from this review are underway. \$13,200/year savings in fuel and maintenance costs were realised immediately, and full savings are expected to be realised from 2026/27 onwards.	>\$400,000/yr cost savings
Customer Service	The Customer Service review identified significant operational efficiency improvements that are expected to deliver \$190,000 in annual savings from 2025/26 onwards. In addition to these direct financial savings, process, technology and workforce improvement initiatives are providing significant efficiency benefits. These time savings will be used to improve customer service delivery and have facilitated improved support to the remainder of the organisation.	>\$200,000/yr cost savings
Development Services	The Development Services process review delivered significant efficiency improvements, with gross average assessment times dropping from 158 days in January 2025 to 125 days in June.	>20% reduction in gross average assessment times

2.3 Continuous improvement initiatives (ongoing)

Continuous improvement (including process mapping and improvements) is a core element of Council's performance management framework, helping to embed a culture of innovation, efficiency and accountability across the organisation. It brings together a wide range of initiatives aimed at enhancing service quality, reducing costs, and ensuring Council operates in line with community expectations, statutory obligations, and strategic priorities.

As part of this program, process mapping commenced in early 2024. This work has provided a clear, visual understanding of workflows, helping staff identify inefficiencies and implement practical improvements. Approximately 270 processes have now been mapped, creating clearer documentation, supporting compliance and generating valuable training resources. While process mapping has directly driven many improvements, it represents just one element of the broader continuous improvement agenda.

Continuous improvement across Council has been achieved through:

- 1. Building internal capability**
Building staff expertise to reduce reliance on external consultants and contractors. This includes upskilling staff, creating specialist roles and enabling teams to perform work previously outsourced, which improves resilience and lowers costs.
- 2. Changed formats of service delivery**
Adjusting how services are delivered to make them more efficient, sustainable, or cost-effective (e.g. outsourcing food handling, using volunteers, introducing new service models).
- 3. Cost avoidance**
Preventing expenditure that would otherwise have been incurred. Achieved by introducing new processes, improving procurement terms, sourcing free or low-cost alternatives and reviewing grants. These initiatives ensure Council delivers the same or better services without additional outlay.
- 4. Digitisation and automation**
Transforming manual, paper-based or repetitive processes into streamlined digital workflows. These initiatives improve accuracy, save staff time, and enhance service delivery by leveraging automation and digitised records.
- 5. Enhanced procurement and contract management**
Securing better value from suppliers through smarter purchasing, bundled contracts and stronger negotiation. This category also includes improved vendor management and consolidation of systems or platforms to reduce duplication.
- 6. Online customer service improvements**
Making it easier for the community to interact with Council by moving services online. These initiatives reduce administrative effort, improve response times and provide more accessible and transparent customer experiences.
- 7. Process improvement**
Analysing workflows to identify inefficiencies and redesign processes. This structured approach ensures consistency, supports training, aids compliance and underpins continuous improvement across all service areas.
- 8. Quality assurance**
Ensuring projects and services are delivered consistently and meet required standards. Initiatives focus on improved oversight and processes that reduce errors and improve quality and reliability.
- 9. Revenue initiatives**
Generating new or enhanced income streams to support Council's financial sustainability. Examples include additional advertising in public places, user fees and charges, improved invoicing systems and better debt management practices.
- 10. Rostering/scheduling adjustments**
Improving efficiency and service coverage through smarter scheduling and rostering. Initiatives include reducing reliance on overtime, staggering shifts and focusing patrols and maintenance where they are most needed, ensuring better use of resources and continuous service delivery.
- 11. Technology improvements**
Enhancing systems and infrastructure to reduce manual handling, improve data accuracy, and increase resilience. These initiatives include system consolidations, platform upgrades, and integrations that improve efficiency and reduce risks.
- 12. Workforce optimisation**
Maximising the impact of our workforce by aligning people, skills, and resources to areas of greatest need, ensuring Council delivers more with the same resources while strengthening resilience and supporting a productive, engaged workforce.

Staff at all levels have been central to this program, proactively identifying and implementing both small-scale adjustments and significant reforms. Together, these initiatives have delivered measurable productivity gains, reduced risks, and created financial capacity to address organisational priorities.

2.3.1 Past and current productivity improvement actions

The tables below highlight specific actions, process changes and initiatives that have already been implemented and have contributed to delivering productivity gains and/or additional revenue.

P1. Building internal capability

Council has made significant progress in reducing reliance on external providers by building specialist skills and expertise in-house. This investment in staff training, multidisciplinary teams, and new roles has increased resilience, improved responsiveness, and reduced costs.

Notable Examples:

- **Planning Legal Counsel:** Appointment of an in-house planning legal counsel reduced reliance on external legal services for appeals and advice.
- **Role evaluations:** Previously outsourced, now conducted in-house, generating ongoing savings and reducing turnaround times.
- **Playground inspections:** Selected team members trained and accredited to conduct inspections, replacing the need for regular external contractors.
- **Prosecutions:** Ranger and Parking Services staff now trained to represent Council in court, eliminating the need for external legal representation.
- **Customer Service transformation:** Teams retrained across multiple functions (call centre, front counter, administration) to create flexibility, improve productivity, and reduce downtime.
- **Strategic planning:** Development of a full suite of Council strategies completed internally, avoiding consultancy costs.
- **Project Management Framework:** Developed in-house rather than relying on consultants, avoiding costs while strengthening governance and delivery of capital projects.

This approach has both reduced expenditure and enhanced Council's long-term capacity to deliver critical services with greater independence and control.

Estimated gains			
\$497,000 cost savings (per year)	\$71,000 cost containment (per year)	\$500,000 cost containment (one-off)	70 hrs/year efficiency gains

P2. Changed format of service delivery

Council has modernised the way certain services and events are delivered, reducing costs while maintaining or improving community outcomes. By moving away from traditional resource-intensive approaches, these changes have created efficiencies, encouraged community participation, and ensured service quality is sustained at a lower cost.

Notable Examples:

- **Business papers:** Transitioned from printing and couriering Council and Committee business papers to online distribution, saving printing and postage costs.
- **Civic events:** Replaced professional musicians and purchased flowers at citizenship and protocol events with reusable arrangements and community performers such as school choirs.
- **Food and beverage delivery:** Introduced food trucks and can-only bar service at North Sydney Oval events, improving service times and variety while cutting internal labour costs.

These initiatives demonstrate Council's ability to adapt service delivery models to be more cost-effective and efficient without compromising outcomes for the community.

Estimated gains	
\$35,000 cost savings (per year)	70 hrs/year efficiency gains

P3. Cost avoidance

Council has reduced unnecessary expenditure through smarter processes, stronger governance, and more efficient use of resources. These initiatives have avoided costs that would otherwise have been incurred, while also delivering efficiency gains and strengthening staff capability. Grant funding arrangements were also altered for one year to address short-term liquidity pressures.

Notable Examples:

- **Fleet management:** Reduction in light fleet by 10 vehicles.
- **Community centres:** In 2025/26, some direct grants were replaced with capital reserves, ensuring funds are used for long-term building improvements rather than one-off operational support.
- **Community transport:** A more cost-effective grant-based funding model for community transport has been adopted.
- **Library catalogue searches:** Internal process changes enabled Council to remain on a lower subscription package, avoiding the need to purchase a higher-level service.
- **Road resheeting:** New asphalt mixes allow thinner layers while maintaining strength, reducing resurfacing costs. Savings are reinvested in additional road works.
- **Workshop improvements:** Investments in cranes, welding benches, and other equipment enabled more complex work to be completed in-house, avoiding outsourcing costs.
- **Youth worker training:** Free training programs replaced the need for Council to cover costs, while enhancing staff knowledge and resilience.
- **Parking fee avoidance:** Relocating a Council vehicle from a paid carpark to a Council site removed annual parking expenses.

These measures show how cost avoidance has been embedded into everyday operations, ensuring Council delivers quality services without incurring additional expenditure.

Estimated gains				
\$63,000 cost savings (per year)	\$113,000 cost containment (per year)	\$318,000 cost savings (one-off)	360 hrs/year efficiency gains	\$450,000 cost savings (one-off capital)

P4. Digitisation and automation

Council has significantly modernised its operations by digitising manual processes and introducing automation across a wide range of services. These changes have replaced paper-based systems, reduced repetitive manual tasks, improved accuracy and reporting, and delivered faster, more consistent outcomes for both staff and the community. The efficiencies gained have freed up staff time for higher-value activities, strengthened compliance, and reduced organisational risk.

Notable Examples:

- **Finance automation:** Accounts Payable/Receivable reminders are now auto generated and sent to officers, reducing delays and manual collation. Invoice approvals are system driven for accuracy and timeliness.
- **Records digitisation:** 70% of property files have been digitised, removing the need for off-site storage and manual handling.
- **Correspondence management:** General inbox emails, routine email registrations, and Access to Information forms are now filtered, classified, and automatically logged into Council's document management system. This ensures quick delivery and fewer oversights.
- **Workplace health and safety digitisation:** Paper-based WHS checklists, audits, risk assessments, and incident reports have been replaced with digital forms and mobile apps in key areas.
- **Environment and building compliance digitisation:** Key processes such as strata terminations, swimming pool applications, and cooling tower inspections have been moved online. Legislative information is now published on Council's website, reducing reliance on phone enquiries, and inspection records are completed through smart forms, enabling faster processing and statistical insights.
- **Revenue systems:** Rates notice templates and inspection-related invoices are generated directly from the ERP system, ensuring accuracy, standardisation, and improved revenue collection.
- **Workforce management:** An automated offboarding workflow ensures all steps are tracked systematically.
- **IT asset management:** Asset records sync automatically with device management systems.
- **Construction permits:** Rangers use a tracker for real-time access to approved permits, removing manual confirmation with Chambers.
- **Ranger operations:** Mobile tech lets Rangers record, lodge, and escalate reports in the field, reducing admin and improving responsiveness.
- **Community engagement:** Automated workflows support programs like the Better Business Partnership with timely, consistent communication.
- **Strategic reporting:** Quarterly and annual reporting updates (including KPIs) are now entered directly into Council's IP&R system, which automatically generates graphs, reports, reminders, and tracking updates.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate how digitisation and automation are delivering efficiency, transparency, and improved service delivery while positioning Council for ongoing innovation and continuous improvement.

Estimated gains

7,620 hrs/year efficiency gains

P5. Enhanced procurement and contract management

Council has delivered significant improvements in procurement and contract management by taking a more strategic and coordinated approach. Through role consolidation, supplier negotiations, bulk purchasing, and the formalisation of long-term agreements, Council has reduced licensing and service costs, avoided large capital expenditures, and strengthened vendor partnerships. These initiatives have improved governance, achieved measurable savings, and redirected resources towards higher-value services that benefit the community.

Notable Examples:

- **Cyber security platforms:** Multiple stand-alone tools were replaced by a unified cyber security platform, reducing licensing costs and staff time spent managing separate systems.
- **Firewall replacement:** Negotiated with the vendor to secure next-generation firewalls at no cost, avoiding a major capital purchase.
- **Telephony, mail, rates and community engagement systems:** Migrated to more cost-effective providers, achieving ongoing annual savings and improved service delivery.
- **Insurance and claims:** Directing repairs to preferred providers reduced costs and improved value for money.
- **Role consolidation:** Combined the Contracts Manager and Procurement Manager into one role, improving governance while reducing staffing costs.
- **Bundled maintenance works:** Packaging jobs geographically achieved significant contractor savings, with funds reinvested into additional works.
- **Use of electric vehicles:** Council has moved towards the purchase of electric vehicles, reducing exposure to fuel price fluctuations.
- **Vendor agreements:** Formalised long-term agreements and secured contributions from external partners, delivering more stable and beneficial outcomes.
- **Bulk purchasing and signage:** Buying materials in larger volumes and switching to reusable signage reduced costs and waste.

These improvements demonstrate how Council is leveraging smarter procurement and contract management to achieve savings, avoid unnecessary expenditure, and redirect resources towards higher-value services and community priorities.

Estimated gains				
\$41,000 cost savings (per year)	\$200,000 additional revenue (per year)	\$667,000 cost containment (per year)	\$92,000 cost containment (one-off)	1,470 hrs/year efficiency gains

P6. Online customer service improvements

Council has transformed customer interactions by moving away from paper-based, manual, and fragmented processes to digital, streamlined, and accessible services. Through online forms, digital platforms, and upgraded web content, customers now have 24/7 access to services, while staff benefit from reduced manual handling, fewer enquiries, and more accurate data capture. These initiatives have delivered efficiency gains, minimised risk of errors, and enhanced transparency, while creating a simpler, faster, and more consistent experience for the community.

Notable Examples:

- **Online forms:** Key hardcopy application/enquiry forms replaced with web-based forms that auto-route requests, reducing manual registration and processing delays.
- **Digital forms:** Some forms, such as the DA checklists, consent forms, and waste management plan, converted to fillable pdfs so they can now be completed and submitted electronically. This has eliminated the print-scan workflows.
- **Public Tree CRM form:** Requests for tree works are now lodged digitally, automatically tracked and assigned, with mobile apps supporting field team responsiveness.
- **Library services:** Online enquiry forms standardised; instant eCard memberships created; fines and fees are now payable online through the library catalogue.
- **Risk claims:** An online request for compensation form ensures complete submissions, reduces back-and-forth emails, and speeds up claims processing.
- **Finance services:** Ratepayers now access notices and balances 24/7 online; and direct debit, refund, and rates notice requests are now fully digitised.
- **Graffiti removal:** Property owner consents submitted via online forms, enabling faster scheduling and response.
- **Building certification requests:** Online fee quote and inspection booking forms streamline application process.
- **Website enhancements:** Website updated to improve content in some key areas such as building compliance, fire safety, planning reforms, and swimming pool certification. Updates include clear guides and explanatory videos to support community awareness and understanding.
- **Community grants:** Applications moved to a digital platform, improving submission, tracking, and reporting for both applicants and staff.

These improvements demonstrate how digitisation has modernised Council's customer service, reducing inefficiencies, ensuring compliance, and delivering a more accessible and transparent service experience for the community.

Estimated gains

1,130 hrs/year efficiency gains

P7. Process improvements

Council has strengthened operations by streamlining workflows, standardising procedures, and embedding smarter practices across multiple service areas. By removing duplication, automating manual processes, and integrating new systems, efficiencies have been created that free up staff for higher-value tasks, reduce risks, and improve consistency. These changes have lifted service standards, reduced compliance and audit risks, and ensured faster, more reliable outcomes for the community.

Notable Examples:

- **IT asset management:** Standardised device naming ensures faster troubleshooting, accurate audits, and easier asset tracking.
- **Arts programs:** Automation of art prize data entry and consolidation of the Creating Wellbeing program delivery partners reduces admin time and supports consistent service delivery.
- **Events management:** Centralised PA system booking and consistent project evaluation frameworks reduce errors and double handling, and improve program planning.
- **People and culture:** A new performance review framework promotes staff development, better record-keeping, and clearer expectations.
- **Parks and reserves:** Playground maintenance integrated into routine Parks and Gardens team duties, reducing inefficiencies and improving responsiveness.
- **Tree management:** Expanded proactive inspections improve safety and asset management without additional staffing.
- **North Sydney Oval:** An upgraded POS supports real-time stock management, reduces waste, improves financial control, and enhances service speed.
- **Environment and building compliance:** Triage of cases, standardised templates, revised food shop ranking procedure, change to bi-annual environmental audits, and streamlined DA referrals all result in improved efficiency, consistency, and transparency.
- **Fire safety process improvements:** Introduced a Fire Safety Manual, reviewed the AFSS register, and brought technical assessments in-house, strengthening compliance and reducing reliance on external consultants.
- **DCP streamlining project:** Simplified the Development Control Plan by removing duplication and increasing clarity, making it easier and faster to apply relevant controls.
- **Bushland management:** Smarter practices such as buffer zone mulching, integrated pest management, and cordless auger tools have reduced labour, chemical use, and safety risks.
- **Ranger services:** Service requests are now routed through supervisors. This increases productivity, ensures timely responses, and frees Rangers to focus on community safety and compliance activities.
- **Communications:** A single social media management platform consolidates posting, scheduling, and reporting, saving staff time and ensuring more consistent engagement.

These initiatives demonstrate how process improvement has been embedded across Council, delivering efficiency gains, reducing risk, and ensuring higher-quality and more responsive services for the community.

Estimated gains			
\$2,000 cost savings (per year)	\$40,000 additional revenue (per year)	\$310,000 cost containment (per year)	5,180 hrs/year efficiency gains

P8. Quality assurance

Council has strengthened quality assurance by improving internal processes, standardising responses, and taking greater control of service delivery. These initiatives have reduced errors, improved consistency, and created more reliable outcomes for both staff and the community.

Notable Examples:

- **Plant selection:** Brought plant selection for new garden beds in-house, ensuring species are better matched to local conditions. This has reduced plant failures, lowered maintenance needs, and improved the visual appeal of public spaces.
- **Traffic and transport:** Introduced upfront guidance for preparing Construction Traffic Management Plans, improving the quality of submissions, reducing back-and-forth, and speeding up approval timelines.
- **Standard response library:** Developed a standard response library for Environment and Building Compliance matters, ensuring consistent replies to enquiries and faster handling of generic queries.

By embedding quality assurance into everyday operations, Council is reducing risk, improving efficiency, and delivering more reliable services. These improvements provide clearer expectations for customers, stronger outcomes for the community, and a more consistent standard of service delivery.

Estimated gains

880 hrs/year efficiency gains

P9. Revenue initiatives

Council has strengthened its financial sustainability by introducing new fees, updating outdated charges, identifying new/expanded revenue opportunities, and recovering costs that were previously absorbed. These measures ensure that those using services or undertaking activities that require additional oversight contribute fairly to the cost of providing them. The initiatives not only improve accountability and cost recovery but also support safer practices, better compliance, and more transparent service delivery.

Notable Examples:

- **NYE managed vantage points:** Introduction of an entry fee in 2025/26 to improve crowd management and offset event costs.
- **Restoration works:** More accurate and proactive inspections ensure recovery of reinstatement costs from developers, reducing financial risk to Council.
- **Parking permits and applications:** Consolidated permit types and online payments introduced, supported by a new application fee structure, improving efficiency and increasing revenue.
- **Parking station leasing:** Temporary lease of unused car park space generated additional income.
- **Compliance cost notices:** Development Control and Fire Safety Orders now include fees to recover Council's regulatory costs.
- **Building Information Certificate fees:** Application fees increased to reflect the true cost of service delivery.
- **Swimming pool compliance:** Introduction of fees for pool directions and commercial pool inspections to support safety and compliance.
- **Food and health regulation:** New urgency, reinspection, and audit fees introduced for food stalls, skin penetration premises, and environmental audits, ensuring cost recovery.
- **Debt recovery program:** Expanded targeted collections across multiple registers, significantly improving cash flow and reducing outstanding balances.
- **Advertising:** Increased advertising opportunities in public spaces generated higher-than-forecast revenue.

These initiatives embed stronger revenue management across Council, supporting compliance, and enabling reinvestment into essential services for the community.

Estimated gains				
\$821,000 cost savings (per year)	\$46,000 cost containment (per year)	\$200,000 additional revenue (one-off)	\$271,000 cost containment (one-off)	1,000 hrs/year efficiency gains

P10. Rostering and scheduling adjustments

Council has strengthened rosters and scheduling practices to reduce inefficiencies, improve service coverage, and better align resources with operational needs. By introducing flexible rosters, adjusting service-level requirements, and staggering shift times, Council has reduced reliance on overtime and casual staff, focused resources where they are most needed, and ensured continuous regulatory coverage. These changes have removed unnecessary expenditure, improved visibility of officers, and ensured more consistent regulatory outcomes for the community.

Notable Examples:

- **North Sydney Oval game day rosters:** More efficient rostering eliminated manager overtime and excessive casual staff costs.
- **Parking patrol shift coverage:** Service level agreement reduced from five patrols every two weeks to five times per month, allowing officers to focus on areas with higher non-compliance.
- **Parking patrol rosters:** New staggered start times (7.30am, 9am, 11am) ensure meal breaks vary, maintaining parking enforcement coverage continuously between 7am and 9pm.

These measures demonstrate how smarter rostering and scheduling are strengthening service delivery while reducing unnecessary costs and increasing revenue.

Estimated gains		
\$12,000 cost savings (per year)	\$631,000 additional revenue (per year)	\$32,000 cost containment (per year)

P11. Technology improvements

Council has made essential upgrades to its technology platforms to improve efficiency, strengthen security, and deliver more reliable services for staff and the community. Many of these improvements have been delivered in-house, with minimal investment, by making better use of existing systems and resources. While these changes have reduced risks and cut manual workloads, they are short-term solutions. Council's core systems remain outdated and will ultimately require significant investment to achieve a sustainable technology environment.

Notable Examples:

- **Enterprise content management:** Migrated from 13 on-premise servers to a cloud-based SaaS platform, improving scalability, reducing maintenance, and enhancing system reliability.
- **Reporting platform:** Transitioned static reports into dynamic, interactive dashboards that provide real-time data, improving decision-making and staff responsiveness.
- **Database backups:** Consolidated into a centralised platform, enabling faster recovery, and reduced risk of data loss.
- **"Before You Dig" service:** Adopted a cloud-based solution for asset location requests, reducing manual interventions and improving community safety.
- **Development assessment tools:** Moved document assessment tools used on tablet devices to the cloud, enabling flexible access from anywhere.
- **Network infrastructure:** Replaced ageing switches and outdated radio links with modern fibre and business-grade internet, significantly improving uptime, reliability, and continuity of services.
- **Automated endpoint patching:** Introduced centralised, cloud-based software patching to strengthen cyber security and reduce manual IT effort.
- **Email and domain protection:** Implemented DMARC protocols to protect Council's domain against phishing and spoofing.
- **Development and building applications:** End-to-end digital integrations with the NSW Planning Portal and streamlined workflows, cut manual handling, and reduced assessment turnaround times.
- **Inspections and compliance:** Introduced digital workflows for food safety, playground and building inspections, improving accuracy, auditability, and speed of follow-up actions.
- **Device management:** Automated the imaging of staff devices, ensuring quicker deployment and fewer errors.
- **Collaboration tools:** Adopted a modern communications platform with integrated chat, video, and document sharing to improve flexibility and teamwork.
- **Library services:** Shifted Shorelink to a cloud-based platform, reducing costs and enabling more timely updates.
- **Governance:** Upgraded webcast technology for Council meetings, improving accessibility and public participation.
- **Parking systems:** Replaced old meters with modern units that update remotely, run on long-life solar power, and accept multiple payment methods, cutting maintenance and downtime and making payment faster and easier.
- **Energy efficiency:** Upgraded street lighting to LEDs and installed solar panels on Council buildings, lowering electricity costs and reducing emissions.
- **Capital project reporting:** Delivered a centralised project tracker and dashboards to improve resource planning and transparency.
- **Volunteer programs:** Digitised Bushcare group reporting with tablets, cutting down paperwork and improving record-keeping.

Council has made practical technology upgrades that save time, improve security, and make services more reliable. Most of this work has been done in-house at low cost by making the best use of existing systems. These are important short-term fixes, but bigger investment will be needed in the future to replace Council's ageing core systems.

Estimated gains		
\$649,000 cost savings (per year)	\$197,000 cost containment (per year)	3,390 hrs/year efficiency gains

P12. Workforce optimisation

Council has taken steps to optimise its workforce by streamlining processes, shifting tasks in-house, making greater use of volunteers, and reducing reliance on external contractors. By making better use of internal resources and community partnerships, Council has improved efficiency, achieved savings, and delivered more consistent service outcomes.

Notable Examples:

- **Arts:** Introduced group and online information sessions for the North Sydney Art Prize, reducing required staff engagement time while improving consistency and transparency for entrants.
- **Library:** Expanded the 1:1 technology help program through a volunteer mentoring model, tripling available sessions and freeing staff time for other tasks.
- **People and culture:** Shifted to a centralised specialist structure, providing clearer accountability, stronger internal support, and faster turnaround times for staff and leaders.
- **Footpaths, roads and drainage:** Shifted concrete waste disposal in-house, delivering cost savings and freeing depot space, without increasing staff workload.
- **Parks and reserves:** Transferred planter box maintenance in Neutral Bay from contractors to the in-house team, achieving savings while improving service consistency and quality standards.
- **Turf:** Transferred mowing of key parks to in-house turf team with an additional mower, reducing costs and ensuring more reliable maintenance of open spaces.
- **Trades and fleet:** Transferred wash bay pit and pump maintenance to in-house trade teams, removing the need for external contractors.
- **Workforce management:** Disestablished or partially capitalised certain roles, reducing salary costs and reallocating resources.
- **Holding vacant positions:** Temporarily held vacant positions to manage liquidity, generating short-term savings.

Together, these workforce optimisation initiatives show how Council is delivering more with less – reducing costs, strengthening internal capability, and improving service quality. While most of these changes create sustainable efficiencies, the practice of holding positions vacant is only a temporary measure and not viable in the long term.

Estimated gains		
\$310,000 cost savings (per year)	\$514,000 cost savings (one-off)	180 hrs/year efficiency gains

2.3.2 Future productivity improvement actions

The tables below highlight some of the planned improvement initiatives that are expected to deliver productivity gains and/or additional revenue in 2026/27 onwards.

F1. Building internal capability

Looking ahead, Council will further strengthen its internal capability. By investing in its workforce and building stronger in-house expertise, Council is positioning itself to achieve ongoing savings, reduce external dependency, and deliver more consistent legal and planning services.

Notable Examples:

- **Planning Legal Counsel (appeals and advice – continuation):** The appointment of an in-house Planning Law Specialist has already generated significant savings by reducing external legal spend. Additional savings will be realised from 2026/27 onwards as pre-existing cases conclude.
- **Planning Legal Counsel – training and representation:** In addition to managing appeals and providing legal advice, the new Planning Legal Counsel will also train staff to confidently manage Land and Environment Court matters, such as Statements of Facts and Contentions and Joint Expert Reports. This will reduce future dependence on consultants, improve consistency, and strengthen legal risk management.

Estimated gains	
\$408,000 cost savings (per year)	70 hrs/year efficiency gains

F2. Changed format of service delivery

Council will continue to modernise its approach to service delivery by shifting away from manual, resource-heavy methods towards scalable and automated solutions. These changes will improve efficiency, reduce risks, and create more reliable outcomes for staff and the community.

Notable Examples:

- **Enhanced e-learning and digital training programs:** Online training modules will be expanded to deliver consistent, role-specific records management training, supported by self-service resources and awareness campaigns. This will replace ad hoc sessions, strengthen compliance, and improve records governance.
- **Robot line marking:** Robotic technology will automate turf line marking, reducing manual effort and workplace risks. Staff time will be redirected to proactive turf care, improving field quality, resilience, and overall community experience.

Estimated gains	
440 hrs/year efficiency gains	

F3. Cost avoidance

Council is embedding longer-term cost avoidance measures that will deliver their full financial impact in 2026/27 and beyond. These initiatives are already underway, but the complete savings will only be realised once transitional factors are resolved.

Notable Examples:

- **Motor vehicle insurance claims process:** A new approach to handling motor vehicle claims, including internal repairs below the excess and a “three strikes” driver policy, has been introduced. While the framework is in place, the full savings will be realised from 2026/27 through reduced insurance premiums and improved driver safety outcomes.
- **Community transport (continuation):** A shift to a grant-based funding model for community transport commenced partway through 2025/26. From 2026/27, the full year of savings will be realised as this model fully replaces contracted services.

Estimated gains	
\$69,000 cost savings (per year)	

F4. Digitisation and automation

Council will continue to digitise and automate processes to reduce manual handling, improve data accuracy, and deliver faster, more reliable services. These initiatives will create efficiencies, reduce risks, and improve customer experience by making services more accessible and transparent.

Notable Examples:

- **Online timesheets and payroll automation:** Council will implement an integrated online timesheet system, eliminating manual entry, reducing errors, and freeing significant staff time while ensuring stronger compliance and faster payroll processing.
- **Automated payment reconciliation:** Manual reconciliation of payments will be replaced with automated processes, reducing errors and improving financial reliability.
- **Online forms migration:** Remaining hardcopy forms will be transitioned to digital platforms, cutting manual processing and making services more accessible 24/7.
- **Notice of sale automation:** Integration with Land Registry Services will automate property data updates, reducing delays and improving statutory compliance.
- **State significant developments automation:** Council will automate the creation of major development application records and document registration, reducing administrative workload and ensuring more timely processing.
- **AI-assisted meeting minutes:** Automation and AI will support faster, more accurate preparation of meeting minutes, freeing staff capacity for higher-value tasks.
- **Automated report saving:** Governance systems will be configured to automatically save reports into Council's document management system, reducing duplication and administrative effort.
- **Grant register automation:** A centralised digital register will improve grant tracking and compliance by automating reminders and status tracking.
- **Digital field reporting (parks and gardens):** Teams will adopt a single digital system for WHS, risk and playground reporting, improving data reliability and freeing time for service delivery.
- **Planning certificate automation:** Once property data is fully integrated into the ERP system, planning certificates will be automatically generated, improving turnaround times and reducing manual checks.

Estimated gains

2,750 hrs/year efficiency gains

F5. Enhanced procurement and contract management

Council will improve procurement by consolidating contracts, streamlining processes, and reducing duplication to save costs and improve efficiency.

Notable Examples:

- **Pre-employment checks:** Bundled background checks with volume discounts will reduce costs and save hiring managers' time, shortening recruitment times.
- **Procurement consolidation:** Common items will be consolidated under unified contracts, leveraging Council's purchasing power and reducing duplication.

The potential cost savings from procurement consolidation are not yet known.

Estimated gains

\$3,000 cost savings (per year)

150 hrs/year efficiency gains

F6. Online customer service improvements

Council will expand and digitise customer service options to make transactions faster, easier, and more convenient, while also reducing staff workload and compliance risks.

Notable Examples:

- **Direct debit option for online payments:** Customers will be able to pay fees via direct debit as well as credit card, lowering costs for larger transactions and reducing staff processing time.
- **DA/planning submissions publication and acknowledgement:** A new portal will automate document registration, apply publication rules, and send acknowledgements, improving compliance and freeing staff for higher-value tasks.
- **Library payments:** Customers will be able to pay online via email links instead of at the counter, saving staff time and making transactions easier for library users.
- **Organisation-wide booking platform:** A single self-service system will consolidate bookings across all facilities and services, reducing duplication and manual workarounds.
- **Resident parking permits:** Online application forms will replace emailed versions, simplifying the process and saving staff time.
- **Visitor parking permits:** Digital permits will reduce front counter visits and cut processing times.

Estimated gains

1,770 hrs/year efficiency gains

F7. Process improvements

Council will streamline and standardise processes across multiple areas to reduce duplication, improve compliance, and deliver more consistent outcomes for staff and the community.

Notable Examples:

- **Document management workflow:** Workflows will be redesigned so tasks are allocated to role-based pools with automated escalation, reducing delays and ensuring timely action.
- **Onboarding:** A centralised digital onboarding process will give new employees a clearer start, improve engagement, and help them reach productivity sooner.
- **Committees and statutory meetings:** Reports for all meetings will be moved to a single document collaboration platform, removing manual formatting and publication tasks while improving accuracy and transparency.
- **Bond management:** A streamlined bond management system will reduce processing steps, cut delays, and improve consistency in bond release.
- **Coal Loader event bookings:** A single online booking form and updated guidelines will simplify processes for event organisers and staff, reducing duplication and increasing clarity.
- **Accessibility guidelines:** New accessibility guidelines, developed with the Access and Inclusion Committee, will be applied to all future capital works, reducing remediation costs and ensuring inclusive infrastructure from the outset.
- **Grants:** A new Community Investment Framework will replace ad hoc funding processes with coordinated partnership agreements, improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency.
- **Communications and engagement requests:** Standardised online request forms and templates will replace ad hoc briefings, reducing miscommunication and ensuring more consistent, timely promotion of Council initiatives.

Potential productivity gains are not yet quantified for some initiatives.

Estimated gains

2,730 hrs/year efficiency gains

F8. Quality assurance

Council will implement stronger frameworks and controls to improve decision-making, reduce risk, and provide more transparent, consistent outcomes.

Notable example:

- **Asset management decision making matrix:** A new framework will guide the selection and prioritisation of capital works by considering asset condition, utilisation, funding opportunities, and community objectives. This will reduce wasted effort, strengthen governance, and improve clarity for staff and stakeholders.

Estimated gains

100 hrs/year efficiency gains

F9. Revenue initiatives

Council will introduce measures to strengthen financial sustainability by ensuring costs are recovered, updating fees to align with benchmarks, and generating additional income through new opportunities.

Notable Examples:

- **New fees for use of public open space:** New fees will be introduced for commercial use of Council's public spaces, creating a structured way to recover maintenance costs.
- **Advertising:** Expanded advertising opportunities in public places have already commenced, with further growth in revenue expected in 2026/27 as new placements become available.
- **Complying Development Certificates (CDC) contributions review:** A new process will ensure all contributions from CDC applications processed by private certifiers are collected. This will reduce the risk of lost income and provide assurance that everyone is paying their fair share.
- **Compliance cost notices (continuation):** The introduction of compliance cost notices for development control and fire safety orders commenced in 2025/26. From 2026/27, the full year of revenue will be realised as the new processes become fully embedded.
- **Resident parking permit fees:** The cost of a first resident parking permit will be moderately increased* to bring fees in line with the City of Sydney. This will generate additional revenue while remaining reasonable for residents.

**Subject to community exhibition and Council approval*

Estimated gains

\$853,000 cost savings (per year)

\$40,000 cost containment (per year)

F10. Rostering and scheduling adjustments

Council will continue to implement rostering and scheduling improvements to optimise workforce efficiency, reduce unnecessary travel, and increase compliance outcomes.

Notable Examples:

- **Parks and gardens maintenance zones:** Maintenance will be organised into geographic zones, reducing travel time and fuel use, lowering safety risks, and allowing more time to be dedicated to maintaining and enhancing open spaces.
- **Parking patrols (continuation):** In 2025/26, the service level agreement was reduced from five patrols every two weeks to five times per month, allowing officers to focus on areas with higher non-compliance. Full benefits from this change will be realised from 2026/27 onwards.
- **Shift coverage (continuation):** In 2025/26, new staggered start times (7.30am, 9am, 11am) and varied meal breaks were introduced to maintain parking enforcement coverage continuously between 7am and 9pm. Full benefits from this change will be realised from 2026/27 onwards.

Estimated gains

\$1,600 cost savings (per year)

\$108,000 additional revenue (per year)

3,900 hrs/year efficiency gains

F11. Technology improvements

Council will continue to implement new technologies and upgrade existing systems to improve efficiency, reduce manual processes, and provide more reliable, secure, and responsive services. These improvements will reduce risks, improve customer experiences, and deliver long-term value.

Notable Examples:

- **Cloud backups:** Moving from tape to cloud-based immutable backups will reduce manual handling, storage, and retrieval processes, while strengthening security, compliance, and recovery capabilities.
- **Customer service requests in ERP:** Migrating customer service requests into the ERP system will enable automated workflows, structured task assignment, and end-to-end tracking, providing faster and more transparent responses to the community.
- **Library supplier orders:** Introducing electronic data interchange for library supplier orders will reduce manual entry, improve accuracy, and free staff time for cataloguing and program delivery.
- **HR analytics and reporting:** Implementing dashboards and standardised reports will save staff time, improve accuracy, and support more data-driven decision-making.
- **Online performance management:** Implementation of a cloud-based performance management and engagement system commenced in 2025/26. From 2026/27, full benefits will be realised through reduced manual reporting, streamlined feedback processes, and improved staff engagement tracking.
- **Financial control reporting:** A new reporting layer for financial control commenced in 2025/26. From 2026/27, managers will benefit fully from reduced manual effort, improved budget visibility, and strengthened financial management across service areas.
- **Coal Loader battery storage:** Adding a battery to the existing solar installation at the Coal Loader will support energy storage, reduce grid reliance, and strengthen the site’s role as a sustainability demonstration site.
- **Image library:** A new digital platform will improve search and storage functionality for the image library, strengthen permission compliance, and reduce staff time spent locating images.

Estimated gains	
\$9,000 cost savings (per year)	3,200 hrs/year efficiency gains

F12. Workforce optimisation

Council will strengthen its workforce planning and development to ensure training investments are aligned with future capability needs, not just immediate requests. This approach will build a stronger leadership pipeline, improve staff retention, and support meaningful career growth.

Notable Example:

- **Learning and capability:** A new learning and development strategy will be introduced, based on Council’s future capability framework and workforce planning. This will ensure training programs are targeted, succession planning is strengthened, and staff development is aligned with long-term organisational needs.

Estimated gains
Potential productivity gains are not yet quantified