

## **Quarterly Report**

January - March 2024

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#### **General Managers Message**



Greg McDonald As we reflect on the first quarter of 2024, we have made significant strides in improving and revitalising our community's infrastructure and services. Our dedicated efforts across various projects underscore our commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

One of the standout events this quarter was Warbirds Over Scone, celebrating its 40th anniversary. This event was more than just an air show; it was a community festival that brought together residents and visitors for a weekend of thrilling aerobatics, delicious street food, and engaging activities for all ages. Crucially, the economic uplift of this event was around \$3 million, with packed cafés, pubs, clubs and accommodation throughout Scone and the wider region.

Australia Day celebrations were another highlight, with numerous events and activities that showcased our community's pride and unity. It was wonderful to see so many residents come together to celebrate our nation's heritage and reflect on what makes the Upper Hunter such a special place to live.

In terms of infrastructure, our bridge replacement program has made remarkable progress. We have completed 12 of the 14 timber bridge replacements under the \$11.6 million NSW Fixing Country Bridges Program. These new bridges are crucial for improving connectivity and safety across the region, ensuring that our rural areas remain accessible and well-connected. Additionally, significant work has been undertaken on the MR358 Merriwa to Willow Tree Road rehabilitation project. This project, currently in its preliminary phase, focuses on laying the groundwork for future construction with detailed project management plans that prioritise safety, quality, and environmental protections. Securing the necessary materials and ensuring robust planning will set the stage for successful execution. This rehabilitation is vital for regional connectivity and economic development, and we are committed to delivering a project that meets and exceeds community expectations.

We have also continued our annual infrastructure programs, investing \$3,107,000 in maintenance across bridges, footpaths, and roads. Key expenditures include \$475,000 on regional roads, \$912,000 on sealed roads, and \$1,720,000 on rural unsealed roads. Notably, we have begun initial seal works on Moonan Brook Road and commenced works on 8km of Barrington Tops Forest Road and a 4km segment of Hunter Road between Moonan Flat and Ellerston.

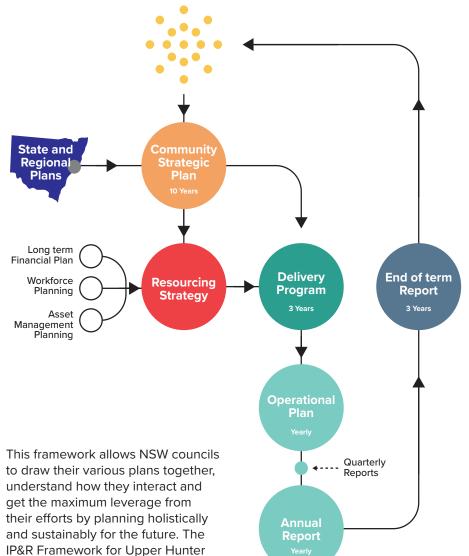
Overall, this quarter has been a period of significant progress and achievement. Our projects are not just about infrastructure; they are about enhancing the overall well-being and connectivity of our community. I am proud of the work we have done and look forward to continuing these efforts in the months ahead.



#### **Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework**

Local Governments in NSW are required to undertake their planning and reporting activities in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 and the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005. In 2009, the Local Government Act was amended to create an Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) requirement. A greater emphasis is placed on longer term planning with key elements including a Community Strategic Plan setting out the strategic directions (minimum of 10 years), Delivery Program outlining how Council will deliver on these directions (4-year period) and an annual Operational Plan. As at June 30, 2012, NSW councils are required to be working within the IP&R Framework.

The Office of Local Government provides guidelines and information to assist councils in meeting their requirements. The IP&R framework recognises that most communities share similar aspirations: a safe, healthy and pleasant place to live, a sustainable environment, opportunities for social interaction, opportunities for education and employment, and reliable infrastructure. The difference lies in how each Community responds to these needs. It also recognises that council plans and policies should not exist in isolation - that they are interconnected.



Shire Council, to be consistent with

these guidelines is presented

in the diagram.

#### Community

# Quarterly Highlight

Merriwa to Willow Tree Rd



The MR358 Merriwa to Willow Tree Road rehabilitation project has been a significant focus for Upper Hunter Shire Council this guarter. As we move through the vital preliminary phase, our efforts are centred on laying the groundwork for future construction. This stage includes the development of detailed project management plans that emphasise safety, quality, and environmental protections. Concurrently, we are procuring critical materials, such as stormwater components, concrete, and guarry products, which are essential for the project's success. These preparatory steps are crucial in ensuring that the rehabilitation work not only meets but exceeds community and regulatory standards, reflecting our commitment to restoring this key access route efficiently and effectively.

Securing funding for the MR358 project and awarding the construction contract to Daracon Group marks a major milestone. Expected to span 19 months, this project aims to significantly enhance regional connectivity and spur economic development. Support from both Federal and State government representatives highlights the strong collaboration across various levels of government. During the December 2023 Ordinary Council meeting, we endorsed a robust project governance model, ensuring transparency and public trust. By partnering with Transport for NSW for project management services and appointing a Senior Project Engineer from the Public Works Advisory, we are committed to expert oversight and successful completion.

The progress made in March has been substantial. We have received Work Health and Safety (WHS), Quality, and Environmental Management Plans. Establishing erosion and survey controls is underway, with surveys for open drains and stormwater controls commencing on 12th February. Site sheds arrived on 20th February, marking the beginning of onground preparations. We also tested insitu igneous rock (strong basalt) for gabion wall construction and carried out shotcrete trial panels and pumpability tests of the concrete mix at Boral Yard in Quirindi. These steps are essential to ensure that the project progresses smoothly and meets the high standards we have set.

Overall, the MR358 Merriwa to Willow Tree Road rehabilitation project is a cornerstone of our infrastructure initiatives this quarter. It represents a significant investment in the future of our region, enhancing connectivity and supporting economic growth while maintaining our commitment to safety, quality, and environmental stewardship. Upper Hunter Shire Council Quarterly Report January Warch 2024

# Community Priorities Report

Council has identified five community priorities to guide Council's agenda.



### **A connected community**

Developing and deepening connections of people to each other and their community.

#### **V** On track

Str	Strategic Objective		Comments	
1.1	Advocate for and increase the availability and affordability of health services.	٠	We are continuing to review actions in the Disability Inclusion Action Plan to ensure they meet the needs of the community.	
1.2	Work collaboratively to address social disadvantage.	•	Council addresses social disadvantage through initiatives like strengthening local community service networks and facilitating events such as International Women's Day, Harmony Day, and Seniors Festival. We support vulnerable populations by participating in the NSW Homelessness Street Count, Upper Hunter Homelessness Forum, and providing assistance to local and outreach services.	
1.3	Increase promotion of healthy lifestyle.	•	Council promotes healthy lifestyles through activities such as the Merriwa Mental Health Expo, Mental Health First Aid training, and partnerships with organisations like Where there's a Will. We encourage community engagement in physical activities like running groups, hockey 5's, pickleball, badminton, and promote events like parkrun, seated yoga, and tai chi. The mountain bike trail at Scone Mountain National Park is nearing completion.	
1.4	Enhance partnerships to maintain a safe community.	•	Council enhances community safety through initiatives like the Drought Resilience project and local networks. We hold regular Community Advisory Committee meetings across all districts and facilitate the Merriwa Family Support Network and Upper Hunter Community Services Interagency, addressing residents' concerns	

and ensuring comprehensive support.



### **A connected community**

Developing and deepening connections of people to each other and their community.

#### 🗸 On track

Strategic Objective			Comments	
1.5	Advocate for, support and provide services and facilities for the community.	•	Council advocates for and provides essential services and facilities including libraries, childcare, youth services, and community services. We offer a variety of affordable housing options catering to diverse community needs, from aged care to support for families exiting domestic violence situations.	
1.6	Provide and support a range of community events, festivals and celebrations.	•	Council supports a vibrant community through events and initiatives like the Kia Ora Youth Music Camp, Australia Day celebrations, International Women's Day, Seniors Festival, and youth school holiday excursions. The Upper Hunter Youth Council, supported by Council's Youth Workers, engages young people in planning and leading activities, fostering leadership and community engagement.	
1.7	Acknowledge and respect our Aboriginal culture, heritage and people.	•	Council liaises with local Aboriginal groups on various community issues. Planning is underway for Reconciliation and NAIDOC Week activities, ensuring our events and activities are inclusive of all	

community members.

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## **Protected Environment**

Ensuring the ongoing protection of our environment and natural resources.

#### **V** On track

Strategic Objective		Comments	
2.1	Advocate for, facilitate and support programs that protect and sustain our diverse environment for future generations.	•	Council facilitates community environmental education programs such as Good for the Hood and the Get Grubby program. These programs allow residents and schools to attend online seminars presented by experts on a range of environmental issues and access information to assist them with their sustainability journey.
2.2	Encourage and support community participation to care for our environment.	•	Council facilitated Clean Up Australia Day, working with the local Scouts and Girl Guides to clean up Elizabeth Park and the adjoining railway station and Campbells Corner carparks.
2.3	Ensure all actions, decisions and policy response to natural hazards and climate change remain current.	•	Council is an ongoing participant in the Hunter Joint Organisation program to develop strategies aimed at building community resilience and disaster recovery capacity at a local level. Three sites were identified locally in Aberdeen, Merriwa, and Murrurundi that could be used for waste storage under emergency conditions.
2.4	Implement and regularly review Strategic Land Use Plans, Environmental Planning Instruments and Development Controls, which reflect the needs and expectations of the broad Community.	•	The Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy has come off exhibition and community consultation has been sought. It is due to go to a Councillor Workshop in May and be tabled at the Council meeting in June.
2.5	Provide efficient and effective advisory, assessment and regulatory services focused on being customer 'friendly', responsive and environmentally responsible.	•	Council continues to provide efficient and effective advisory, development assessment, and regulatory services. Development assessment and building certification timeframes, inspection programs, and responses to customer complaints have been tracking reasonably well.
2.6	Plan, facilitate and provide for a changing population for current and future generations.	•	The Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy has come off exhibition and community consultation has been sought. It is due to go to a councillor workshop in May and be tabled at the Council meeting in June. Two meetings were held with the state government regarding housing and expansion.

#### **Protected Environment**

Ensuring the ongoing protection of our environment and natural resources.

## 🗸 On track

#### **Strategic Objective**

- 2.7 Provide efficient and effective waste and recycling services and support improved waste minimisation and recycling practices.
- 2.8 Implement policies to ensure the protection of strategic agricultural lands, equine critical industry clusters, natural resources and heritage.

#### Comments

- Council participates in the Hunter Joint Organisation's Circular Economy Knowledge Hub. To date, a review of the current practices of all Councils has been undertaken to gain an understanding of knowledge gaps, missing information, and the costs of various circular economy initiatives already in place.
- Council continues to apply the provisions of the Upper Hunter LEP and DCP when assessing development applications to ensure the protection of strategic agricultural lands, equine critical industry clusters, natural resources, and heritage. Council resolved to endorse the draft Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy and place the strategy on public exhibition, which contains a range of strategic directions to protect these critical areas.

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## **Thriving Economy**

#### Strengthening our vibrant industries and economy while seizing emerging opportunities.

## 🗸 On track

Str	Strategic Objective		Comments	
3.1	Broaden and promote the range of business and industry sectors.	•	The Place Branding Initiative has actively engaged diverse local business sectors including agriculture, tourism, and arts, integrating their unique attributes into our regional branding strategy. This initiative aims to elevate the region's profile, attract investments, and boost tourism, providing substantial support to local businesses. As the project moves into strategic development, it promises to enhance the economic diversity and strengthen the visibility of Upper Hunter's business sectors on a national level.	
3.2	Encourage retail and commercial business to increase local employment opportunities.	•	We have made significant progress in revitalising the Scone CBD, now 50% complete, and have invested heavily in the Merriwa CBD. These projects aim to transform our town centres into vibrant, attractive spaces, drawing new businesses and shoppers and creating more local job opportunities.	
3.3	Provide attractive and functional town centres and support revitalisation of the towns and villages including investment in built heritage and improvement of existing buildings.	•	Council is investing in its town centres. Both Merriwa and Scone have seen significant capital upgrades in 2023/24, enhancing the attractiveness and functionality of these areas.	
3.4	Provide diversity in tourist attractions and experiences.	•	Council continued to improve visitation of Hunter Warbirds aviation facility. Council also produced Warbirds over Scone which saw thousands flock to Scone airport for a two day celebration of aviation heritage.	
3.5	Promote the Upper Hunter's unique brand identity.	•	Council has received funding to prepare a brand identity. This project will be undertaken over the 2023/24 and 24/25 financial years to promote the area, drive economic development and foster community pride.	
3.6	Facilitate and support increased and innovative tourism and marketing opportunities.	•	Council will continue to support tourism through the four main events across the shire each year as well as contributing to events through its donations policy which provides financial support to local groups.	

On track • Needs improvement • Off track

## 114

#### **Quality Infrastructure**

Maintaining and developing our infrastructure network to meet the ongoing needs of our population.

#### 🗸 On track

#### **Strategic Objective**

- 4.1 Provide for replacement, improvement and additional Community and open space infrastructure through investment, best practice and risk management.
- 4.2 Provide inviting public spaces that are clean, green, properly maintained, well designed, encourage active participation, family friendly and accessible to all.
- 4.3 Provide safe and reliable water and sewerage services to meet the demands of current and future generations.
- 4.4 Upgrade and maintain the road network and bridges.

#### 4.5 Advocate and improve access to communication services.

#### Comments

- Murray Bain oval playground facility improvement works are in progress. These works include the removal and relocation of exercise equipment and installing new playground equipment. Jefferson park Marsterplan development works are in progress with the concept plans completed and the community consultaion ongoing. A similar plan for Merriwa Sport Precinct was initiated with the user group.
- Town cleaning was carried out for the Hunter Warbirds air show;
  Scone swimming pool rehabilitation works are in progres. Outher routine maintenance works such as tree trimming, landscaping and cemetary maintenance are been carried out.
- Council continued to deliver water main replacements and sewer relining to renew existing assets. Council undertook planning for the future Water treatment Plant and the renewal of the Scone Sewerage Treatment Plant.
- Council continued with the annual programs such as reseal program, heavy patching, slashing and flood recovery works. Council's focused investment in infrastructure, with a total maitenance expenditure of \$3,107,000 across bridges, footpaths, and roads, reflects our commitment to enhancing community connectivity and safety. Key expenditures include \$475,000 on regional roads, \$912,000 on sealed roads and \$1,720,000 on rural unsealed roads. Council has completed 12 of the 14 timber bridge replacements under the \$11.6 million NSW Fixing Country Bridges Program. Council has undertaken initial seal works on Moonan Brook Road and has commenced works on 8km of Barrington Tops Forest Road and 4km segment of Hunter Road between Moonan Flat and Ellerston. The total cost of these works is approx \$21 million.
- Council meets regularly with Telstra representatives to advocate for improved telecommunication services.

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## Responsible Governance

## 🗸 On track

#### **Strategic Objective**

- 5.1 Effectively and efficiently manage the business of Council, while encouraging an open and participatory Council with an emphasis on transparency, community engagement, action and response.
- 5.2 Council is focused on innovation and continuous improvement to ensure a high quality of service which is aligned with business needs and community priorities.
- 5.3 Effective financial and asset management to ensure council's long-term sustainability.

- 5.4 Open and effective communication methods and technology are utilised to share information about Council plans, intentions, actions and progress.
- 5.5 Community is effectively engaged, can provide opinion and contribute to decisions that plan for the present and future of the Upper Hunter Shire.

#### Providing efficient and responsible governance in order to effectively serve the community.

#### Comments

- Council ensures robust governance through monthly Council and committee meetings, plus quarterly Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings, promoting transparency and community engagement.
- Council continually reviews its processes. The Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) oversee Council's operations and are specifically formed to review Risk and Improvements in the organisation.
- Management keeps Council updated on financial and asset management through monthly meetings of the Corporate Services Committee and Infrastructure Services Committee, excluding January. The Corporate Services Meeting reviews financial performance, including budget variations, cash and investments, loans, and capital works spending. The Infrastructure Meeting examines work programs and major project updates for transport, water, and sewer infrastructure, identifying potential risks. Every quarter, a detailed report is provided, offering in-depth analysis of significant budget variations across service areas.
- For the quarter, Council continued to increase its digital audience and reach on social media platforms, along with steady increases in usage for its website, which was updated in 2023.
- Council published 33 public notices on its website encouraging community feedback and contribution across development applications, public space consultation, Australia Day awards and Scone Cup Public Holiday. The transition to accessible mobile responsive electronic forms to facilitate user feedback has continued, supporting greater utilisation and participation.

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## Responsible Governance

## **V** On track

Stra	Strategic Objective		Comments	
5.6	Develop and maintain effective reporting systems that enable Council to measure and report on performance.	•	Council has effective financial, risk management, KPI reporting and other Governance tools to ensure it captures and reports relevant information to Councillors and the community.	
5.7	Effective management of risk underpins all Council decisions, service delivery and behaviours.	•	Council reviews its corporate risk register quarterly and reports this to ARIC.	
5.8	Develop leadership skills and build networks through a range of formal and informal opportunities.	•	Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to leadership development, delivering a total of 24 group training sessions. These sessions, attended by 228 participants, were carefully designed to foster leadership skills and enhance connectivity among staff.	
5.9	Ensure Council is a great place to work by supporting Council employees in maximising their contribution.	•	Council's commitment to creating a supportive and engaging work environment is reflected in our impressive staff retention rate of 92%. This achievement underscores our success in fostering a culture where employees feel valued and empowered to maximise their contributions.	
5.10	Encourage and build strong partnerships between the Community, business and all levels of government to support implementation of the CSP 2032 and to deliver the Community priorities.	•	Through our Community Advisory Committees, we ensure diverse community insights shape our strategies. Collaborations with local Chambers of Commerce and economic groups integrate business perspectives, while solid relationships with state and federal governments align our efforts with broader objectives.	
5.11	To participate and encourage regional coordination and planning between Councils and other organisations.	•	Council is member of the Hunter Joint Organisation and Committee for the Hunter. We have strong relationships with the Office of Local Government, Local Government NSW.	
5.12	Provide timely and effective advocacy and leadership on key community issues and priorities.	•	Council advocated strongly for federal funding for MR358 rehabilitation, coordinating with State and Federal local members to	

Providing efficient and responsible governance in order to effectively serve the community.

place pressure on the Government to fulfill funding commitments.

# **KPI Summary**

	on track	76%
Council is successfully meeting 76% of its	off track	<b>21</b> %
33 key performance indicators.	needs improvement	6%

Department	KPI	Status
Assets and Strategic Projects	Infrastructure Assets – 100% renewal ratios met	•
Assets and Strategic Projects	Project Mgt Cost - 6% of total project cost	٠
Assets and Strategic Projects	Design of future work – 80% of two year works program complete	٠
Business Services	10% improvement of performance of Business Services operations	٠
Business Services	\$5m in economic uplift across the Shire from events and business initiatives	٠
Business Services	80% of planned capital works and property development strategy	•
Community Services	80% utilisation of all Community Services facilities on a whole	٠
Community Services	Total number of community engagement activities delivered > 100 per annum	٠
Community Services	95% compliance of all service agreement and regulated requirements.	•
Finance	Financial Audit items met on time and annual returns submitted by the due date	•
Finance	Ensure sufficient working capital is available for ongoing solvency	٠
Finance	Plant utilisation greater than 70%	•
Governance	100% of all regulatory deadlines met	•
Governance	90% of Audit actions completed by target date	•
Governance	90% of Fit for the Future ratios met	•

# **KPI Summary**

Department	КРІ	Status
HR	85% staff retention	•
HR	Average time of recruitment measured from the date the requisition in HR Hub is approved to the date the letter of offer is signed is less than 10 weeks	•
HR	WH&S – LTIFR	٠
IT	8 new process improvements undertaken with units to reduce time and improve accuracy of processes	٠
IT	90% tickets completed within SLA	•
IT	95% of staff training around cyber security.	•
Planning	100% of inspection programs on target	•
Planning	Percentage of customer complaints responded to within 48 hours (95%)	•
Planning	Processing times of DAs (< 35 days)	•
Waste	25% Diversion of all waste from landfill	٠
Waste	50% Kerbside diversion rates from landfill	•
Waste	Percentage of Sustainability targets met	•
Water and Sewer	100% water and sewer asset renewal as a percentage of depreciation	•
Water and Sewer	Capital Works completed	٠
Water and Sewer	98% Supply of potable water for customers within Council's testing methods in the current financial year	٠
Works	80% Capital Works completed	•
Works	90% Maintenance completed	•
Works	95% of Customer complaints closed within 14 days	•

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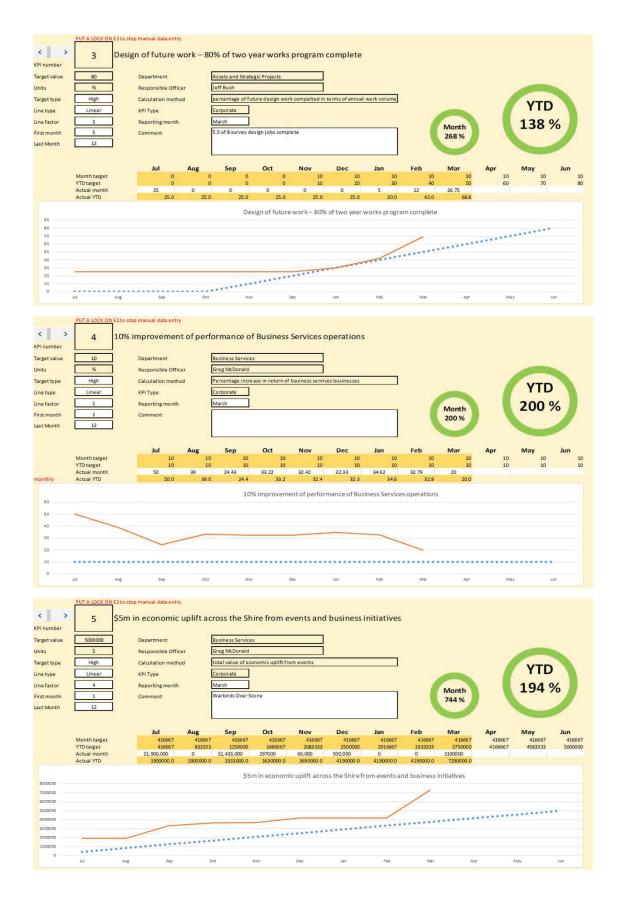
# Key Performance Indicators

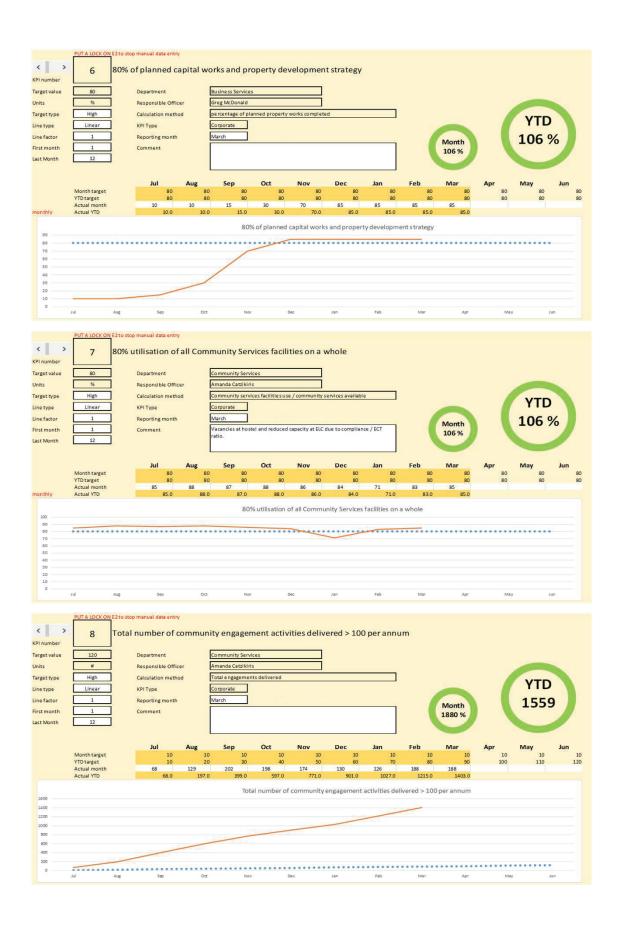
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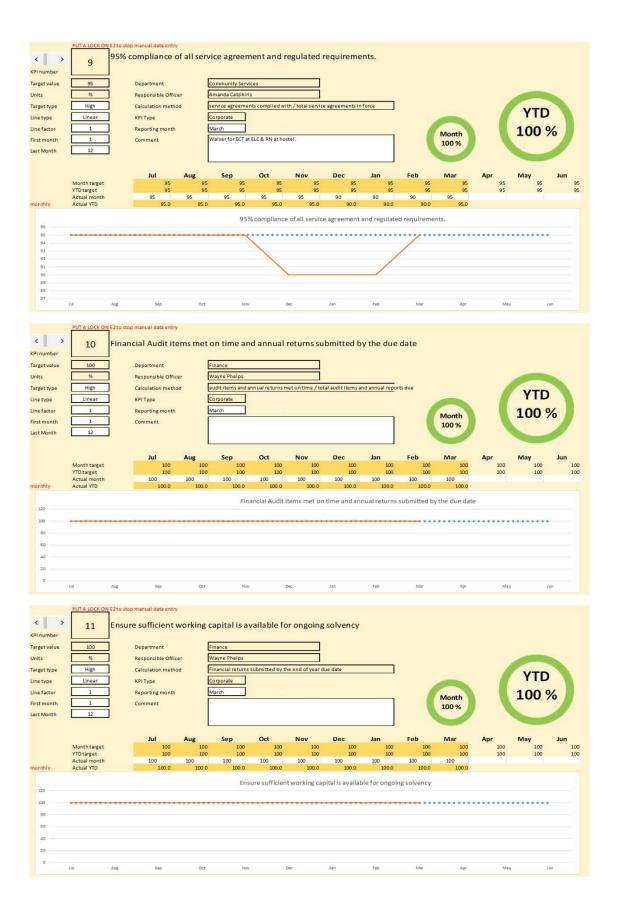
- KPI Summary
- KPI Report

Council tracks its progress through 33 Key Performance Indicators.

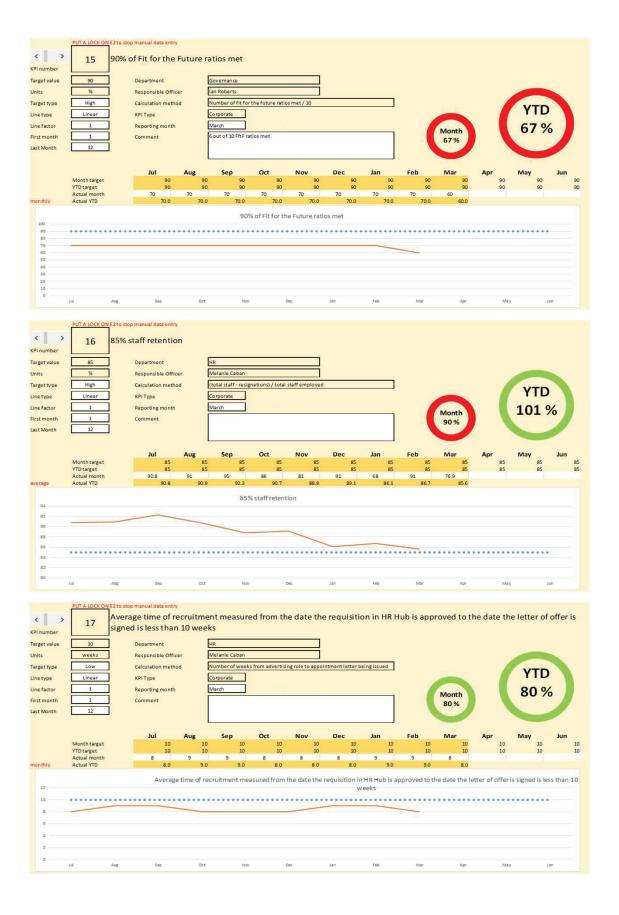




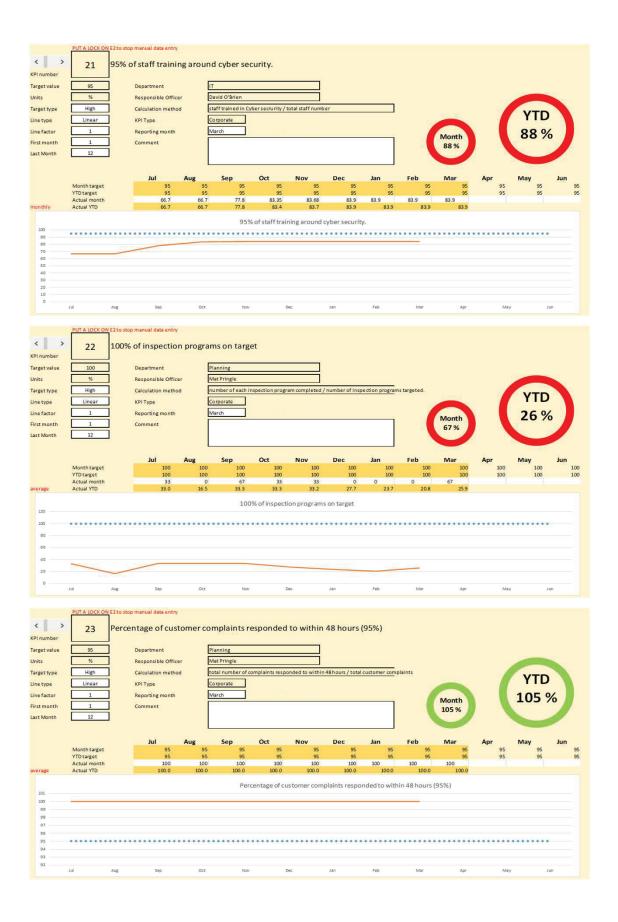




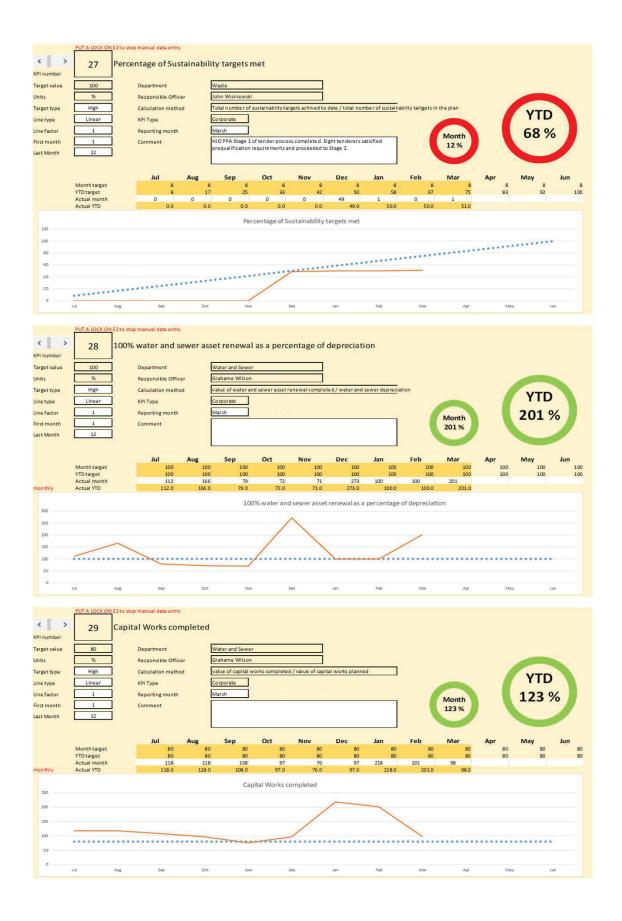




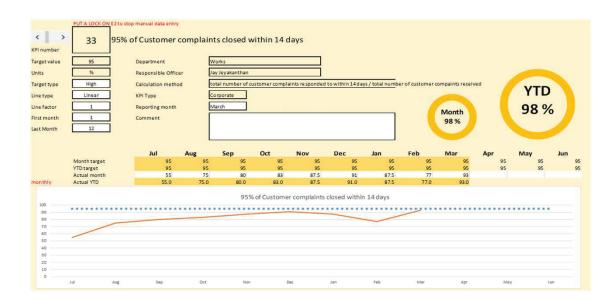












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