

2024

Wingecarribee

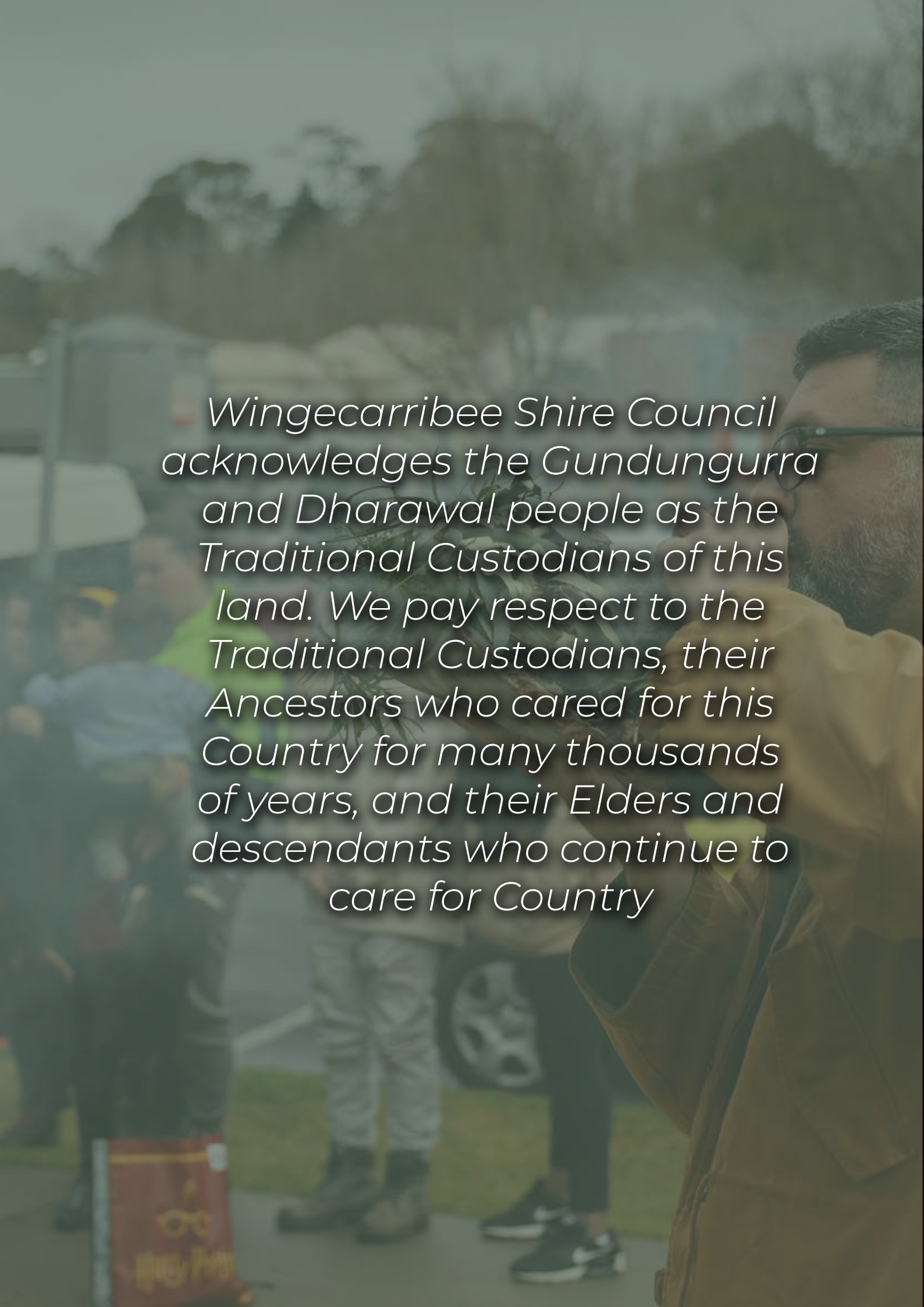
SHIRE COUNCIL

*Administrator's
End of Term Report*



Wingecarribee
SHIRE COUNCIL

We're with you.

A man with a beard and glasses, wearing a brown jacket, is shown in profile on the right side of the frame, holding a large bundle of greenery. The background is a blurred outdoor scene with a crowd of people, some wearing blue uniforms and yellow high-visibility vests. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, serif font.

*Wingecarribee Shire Council
acknowledges the Gundungurra
and Dharawal people as the
Traditional Custodians of this
land. We pay respect to the
Traditional Custodians, their
Ancestors who cared for this
Country for many thousands
of years, and their Elders and
descendants who continue to
care for Country*



Our Community's Vision

Wingecarribee 2041

We are...

*... a healthy, respectful, productive community,
learning and living in harmony, proud of our
heritage and nurturing our environment.*

Our Organisation's Vision

*We strive to make a positive impact
in our community!*

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Executive Summary

On 12 March 2021, the then Minister for Local Government, the Hon. Shelley Hancock MP suspended Wingecarribee Shire Council and appointed an Interim Administrator, Mr Viv May PSM, for a period of three months. The role was extended in May 2021 and a Public Inquiry announced in September.

In July 2022, and following the Inquiry, the Governor on the recommendation of the new Minister the Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP, appointed Mr May to the role of Administrator until the local government elections in September 2024.

This Administrator's End of Term Report (the Report) is an overview of the Administration period and provides residents and the incoming Council with information about progress to date against key initiatives.

The Report highlights key work completed or in train as of August 2024.

Highlights are presented by Key Result Area.



Achievements include:

- Revision of the Community Strategic Plan to address new and emerging issues
- Adoption of a two-year Delivery Program and three Operational Plans and Budgets
- Development of a framework to guide future Service Reviews
- Establishment of the Audit Risk and Improvement Committee and Independent Planning Panel
- Delivery of over \$200 million in capital works across the Shire
- Adoption and refreshing of over 50 policies to guide Council decision-making
- Improvements to online services including the launch of the DA Tracker, a 'single source of truth' for development applications
- Development and roll out of a Strategic Outcomes Works Program to address social, economic and environmental outcomes
- Introduction of Village Visits and a new Community Engagement Strategy
- Development of a Village Place Plan Program as part of a new place-based approach to planning and service delivery
- Adoption of an integrated Resourcing Strategy to manage close to \$3 billion in assets and secure the long term financial sustainability of the Council
- Commissioning 12 Independent Reviews and implementing over 200 subsequent recommendations
- Adoption of the Shire's first Asset Management Plans and detailed capital program which features over 700 specific projects
- Review of kerbside collection zones with 600 plus additional properties now receiving a kerbside collection

About the Administrator's End of Term Report

The Administrator's End of Term Report provides the Wingecarribee Shire community with an overview of progress made during the period of Administration. It also provides information to assist the incoming Council as it sets the strategic priorities for the next four years.

It marks the end of a three and a half year term which commenced on 12 March 2021 with the appointment of Mr Viv May PSM as a then Interim Administrator following the suspension and subsequent dismissal of the elected Council.

In the absence of an elected body, the Administrator was tasked in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 with performing all the functions, powers and duties of the Council; effectively acting as both Mayor and Councillors.

Importantly, the Administrator has fulfilled a critical role in helping to rebuild trust and confidence with the community, providing honesty and transparency in decision making and delivering genuine opportunities for the communities of the Shire to have their say on the matters that concern them.

The period has not been without its challenges.

In addition to the disruption caused by the dismissal of the Council, the community and organisation has endured extreme weather events, the COVID-19 pandemic and cost of living pressures.

Working with the community and partnering with a new General Manager, the Administrator has focused efforts on both acknowledging and understanding the challenges of the past and righting the ship.

Priority has been given to addressing legacy issues, reconnecting with the community and delivering best value services.

Every effort has been made to ensure minimal disruption to ongoing service delivery while progressing significant capital works projects and strategic planning that had stalled under previous leadership.

In addition, all efforts have been made to provide the incoming Council and broader community with full visibility of the costs of delivering individual Council run services, as demonstrated in the annual Operational Plan and Budget 2024/25.

This End of Term Report outlines key achievements made during the Administration period and areas requiring ongoing focus.

It is structured around eight Key Result Areas identified during the course of Administration as requiring attention and acceleration.

Information is based on content from published progress reports, including Annual Reports, Administrator Minutes to Council meetings along with Council business papers.

It is a companion document to the Annual Report 2023/24 and the State of Our Shire, both of which will be published in November 2024, and provides a snap shot of progress made towards implementing Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan, as well as the Community Strategic Plan (CSP).

“Priority has
been given
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About Wingecarribee Shire Council

Wingecarribee Shire Council was established on 1 January 1981 following the amalgamation of Mittagong Shire Council, Bowral Municipal Council and the former Wingecarribee Shire Council.

The Shire itself, is located 75 km from the south-western fringe of Sydney and 110 km from Sydney's central business district. The Shire has a total area of approximately 2,700 km², 56 per cent of which is north of the Wingecarribee River.

It is comparable in size to that of urban Sydney, averaging 55 km from east to west and 45 km from north to south, with its geographic centre north-west of Berrima and its demographic centre to the south-east of Bowral.

This area is known to residents and tourists alike as the Southern Highlands of New South Wales and is regarded for its beautiful rural landscapes, rich natural environment and village charm.

This Shire is an important catchment area for water supply to Sydney, Wollongong and the Northern Shoalhaven.

The main towns are:

- Mittagong
- Bowral
- Moss Vale

The area consists of many villages including Bundanoon, Hill Top, Yerrinbool, Colo Vale, Robertson, Berrima, New Berrima, Exeter, Burrawang, Penrose, Alpine, Wingello, Sutton Forest, Avoca, Fitzroy Falls, Balmoral, Buxton, Medway, Wildes Meadow, Kangaloon, and East Kangaloon.

There were approximately 53,109 people living in the Shire in 2023, with the population forecasted to grow to 65,659 by 2041.

It is an economically diverse community, with 2.6% of public or social housing through to extremely wealthy individuals. In 2021, the largest age group in Wingecarribee Shire was 70 to 74 years.

Key challenges for the area as identified in the refreshed Wingecarribee Community Strategic Plan include:

- Managing population growth
- Protecting biodiversity and the natural environment
- Planning for affordable and diverse housing
- Supporting young people to live, work and play in the Shire
- Supporting older people to navigate and access the services they need
- Ageing and weather affected infrastructure
- Increasing frequency and severity of weather events and impacts of climate change
- Providing families with access to appropriate services and community facilities
- Providing affordable and acceptable levels of service across a large geographic area
- Managing the impacts of cost of living pressures



OUR COMMUNITY

POPULATION

2024 Population = 53,109



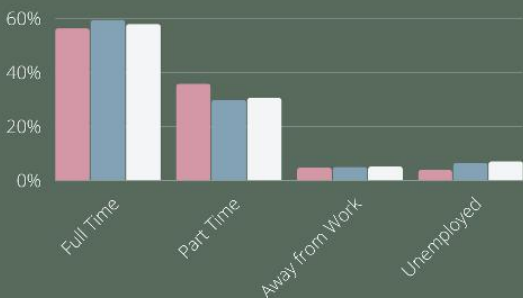
population increased by 4,825 people (10.1%) from 2016 to 2021. An average of 1.94% per year over the period.

Our projected population in 2041 is 65,275

AGE STRUCTURE



EMPLOYMENT



HOUSING



90.7%

Shire's residents live in standalone dwellings



9%

medium-density housing



23,618

total dwellings



26%

single person households



32%

two person households



43%

Own our home



81%

Work and Live in the Shire



23%

participate in volunteering activities higher than NSW figure of 18.1%



48% of the population are males *2024



52% of the population are females *2024



In 2021, 2,940 people (or 5.6% of the population) reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability. This was a similar percentage to 2016.



77%

of us were born in Australia



6.6% of residents identify as First Nations and Torres Strait Islander Peoples



7%

of us speak a language other than English

In 2021 the median age was 47 years compared to a State average of 39 years

The largest changes in the age structure between 2016 and 2021

- Seniors (70 to 84) (+2,036 people)
- Young workforce (25 to 34) (+775 people)
- Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59) (+454 people)
- Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49) (+345 people)



12.8%

of the population earned an income of \$2,000+ per week.



36.3%

of us have a long-term health condition



Land area 2,689 square km

*Source: <https://forecast.id.com.au/wingecarribee> prepared by ID (Informed decisions), October 2021 and ABS Statistics



Over 370 native mammal, reptile and bird species

1558 native plant species
50 threatened or endangered native plant species

53 threatened or endangered native animal species

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

Day to day operations of the Council are the statutory obligation of the General Manager and matters are also delegated as provided in Council resolutions and delegations, and in accordance with relevant legislation.

The General Manager, Ms Lisa Miscamble, was appointed by the Administrator in 2021 and has played an invaluable role in resetting the organisation after a period of significant disruption.

Corporate performance is monitored through quarterly financial reports and quarterly reports against the Delivery Program and Operational Plan and an Annual Report.

The organisation's staff consists of approximately 490 full time equivalent employees working across one of the largest local government areas (land size) in NSW. Councils full time equivalents has increased by almost 10 FTE as it looks to address the risk of an aging workforce by introducing a number of trainee positions. The approach in addressing this risk has been to convert vacant officer level roles with two trainees, resulting in an increase in headcount in some areas, whilst limiting the impact on Council's financial position. Council is also mitigating risks in the Development and Regulatory Services branch, where additional resources have been created, including additional trainees, to reduce the reliance on contractors in the coming financial year.

In 2024/25, the Council had an Operational Budget of \$162 million supporting delivery of a wide range of services from waste management and planning and development services through to recreational facilities and open space management.

The budget also includes an annual investment of approximately \$105 million in local infrastructure.

Over the next four years more than \$405 million has been committed towards critical assets including roads, footpaths and water and sewage assets.

Table: Consolidated Budget 2024/25

	2023/24 Original Budget (\$,000)	2023/24 Q3 Budget (\$,000)	2024/25 Budget (\$,000)	\$ Movement	% Movement
Income from Continuing Operations					
Rates and Annual Charges	94,292	94,192	99,465	5,173	5.49%
User Charges and Fees	24,039	23,949	26,166	2,127	8.85%
Interest and Investments Revenue	4,752	8,862	8,400	3,648	76.76%
Other Revenues	2,729	3,837	3,454	724	26.53%
Grants and Contributions - Operating	9,693	3,795	11,718	2,025	20.89%
Grants and Contributions - Capital	24,873	33,750	36,816	16,268	48.02%
Total Income from Continuing Operations	160,379	168,385	186,019	25,641	15.99%
Expenses from Continuing Operations					
Employee Costs	47,715	46,304	50,396	2,680	5.62%
Borrowing Costs	433	470	730	297	68.56%
Materials and Services	45,730	55,733	56,427	10,697	23.39%
Depreciation Amortisation Impairment	43,098	43,098	50,720	7,622	17.69%
Other Expenses	3,642	3,491	3,579	-63	-1.72%
Loss / (Gain) on Disposal of Assets	0	0	0	0	0.00%
Total Expenses from Continuing Operations	140,617	149,095	161,852	21,234	15.10%
Operating Result from Continuing Operations	19,761	19,289	24,168	4,406	22.30%
Net Operating Result from Continuing Operations excluding Grants and Contributions used for Capital Purposes	-5,112	-14,460	-12,649	-7,537	147.44%
FTE (Full Time Equivalent Employees)	481.6	481.6	491.25	9.65	2.00%

Background to Administration

On 8 September 2020 the then Minister for Local Government issued Wingecarribee Shire Council with a Performance Improvement Order under section 438(A)(3)(a) of the Local Government Act 1993. The reasons for the order included:

- Reputational and work, health and safety risks as a consequence of the behaviours of some councillors
- Evidence of hostility and acrimony between councillors that if unaddressed is likely to lead to dysfunction
- Behaviours that indicate that some councillors may not understand their obligations under the code of conduct when dealing with each other

The Order also required that a temporary adviser be engaged to bring councillors together to address acrimony and hostility and a temporary adviser to provide advice and assistance with the conduct of Council meetings.

On the 2 March 2021, the Minister issued Council with a Notice of Intention to Issue a Suspension Order, citing that she had formed a preliminary view that the Performance Improvement Order has been unsuccessful and that the appointment of an Interim Administrator may be necessary to restore the proper or effective function of Council.

The Council were invited to provide a written response by way of resolution within in 7 days of the Notice of Intention.

At an Extraordinary Meeting held on the 9 March 2021, Council resolved to provide its written response to the Minister.

On 12 March 2021, the Minister suspended Wingecarribee Shire Council and appointed an Interim Administrator Mr Viv May PSM for a period of three months.

The suspension period was extended for a further three months on 27 May 2021.

On the 10 August 2021 the Administrator wrote to the Minister recommending consideration of a Public Inquiry into Wingecarribee Shire Council under section 438U of the Local Government Act. The Administrator's letter cited key 9 reasons for the Minister to consider a Public Inquiry and stated "I have formed a view that suspended Council has failed the community in the exercise of its functions, provision of core services decision making, community participation, financial management and its responsibilities in relation to Integrated Planning and Reporting."

One example cited by the Administrator was the Civic Centre Refurbishment Project. An independent review of the project found governance oversight and management reporting on this significant and potentially contentious project between 2016 and 2019 lacked transparency. While reporting of funding may not have been open and transparent it was apparent that the elected body approved the expenditure via the adoption of Operational Plans and approved revotes.

This review also highlighted that due process had not been followed in relation to the required Capital Expenditure Review (Business Case). The Business Case was submitted to the Office of Local Government on 4 December 2019 and Council accepted a

The Office of Local Government Complaint Statistics for the 2020/21 highlighted Wingecarribee Shire Council was second most complained about Council in NSW.

The first Council meeting during Administration was held on the 17 March 2021, the livestream attracted approximately 1,200 views.

tender for the works to be completed on 11 December 2019 with the contract for building works signed in February 2020. This occurred prior to the Office of Local Government acknowledging the Business Case in April 2020. Additionally, the review was not tabled at a Council meeting or endorsed by the Council.

On 1 September 2021, the NSW Government announced a Public Inquiry would be held into Wingecarribee Shire Council.

More than 120 written submissions were received in response to the Commissioner's call for submissions. The Public Inquiry hearings were held over 15 days in the Council Chambers and live streamed, in addition closed hearings were also held. The Commissioner also issued various summonses seeking the production of documents held by Council resulting in thousands of pages of material being produced.

On 14 July 2022, the former Minister for Local Government, announced that she had accepted the key recommendations from the Public Inquiry, which identified dysfunction within the governing body that resulted in "negative impact on the organisation" and impaired the Council's ability to fully perform its functions.

As a result, the suspended councillors were dismissed and Mr May was appointed by the Governor to remain in the role of Administrator until the local government elections in September 2024.

In the absence of the elected body, the Administrator determines Council policy and strategic directions in discussion with key stakeholders.

The Administrator:

- Provides stewardship to the Shire and in the absence of the elected Council
- Works with the General Manager to set strategy and planning that will guide the organisation between now and the next local government election
- Acts as the key decision-maker on civic issues in the absence of an elected Mayor
- Provides opportunities for community members to participate in matters that impact them

The next local government elections will be held on 14 September 2024.

There was strong community interest in the Public Inquiry, the Commissioners Final Report noted "I have been informed as at the 3 May 2021, there has been almost 12,000 views of the live stream or recording across the 15 days of the Public Hearings. The proceedings on 14 April 2022 received in excess of 1,200 views alone".

TIMELINE

12 MARCH 2021

Interim Administrator, **Mr Viv May PSM**, appointed by Minister for Local Government, **The Hon Shelley Hancock MP**.

1 SEPTEMBER 2021

Minister announces a Public Inquiry into Wingecarribee Shire Council.

13 JULY 2022

Following the Inquiry, the Governor on the recommendation of the new Minister the Hon Wendy Tuckerman MP, appointed Mr May to the role of Administrator until the local government elections in September 2024.

14 SEPTEMBER 2024

NSW Local Government Elections

Effecting Change

Fulfilling the role of Administrator is a difficult task; partly because it requires the individual to step into an already challenging and highly scrutinised landscape while being tasked with restoring order and rebuilding trust.

An Administrator must manage the complex interplay of politics, bureaucracy and community dynamics that shape local governance. In effect the Administrator is the face and voice of the Council and is accountable directly to residents.

Building consensus among diverse stakeholders, managing competing interests, and fostering constructive dialogue are essential skills for effectively leading the Council through a period of transition and transformation.

The Administrator must also confront any underlying structural and systemic challenges that contributed to the Council's suspension in the first place.

At Wingecarribee, this has meant strengthening accountability and transparency and fostering a culture of ethical leadership and genuine community engagement.

Despite these challenges, the role of the Administrator presents opportunities for positive change and renewal. By seizing the opportunity to enact meaningful reforms and genuinely engage the community, the Administrator can set a course for more accountable and responsive local government.

During the period of Administration, the following key areas were identified as requiring attention with a view to restoring good governance, improving service delivery, and strengthening communication and community participation.



This Administrator's End of Term Report is structured by the Key Result Areas below:

1. Governance
2. Community Engagement
3. Financial Management
4. Local Infrastructure
5. Best Value
6. Organisational Performance
7. Planning and Development
8. Lessons Learned

Highlights by Key Result Area



KEY RESULT AREA 01: GOVERNANCE

“Responsible leadership and transparency in decision making”



KEY RESULT AREA 02: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

“Genuine opportunities for communities to have their say”



KEY RESULT AREA 03: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

“Securing the long term financial sustainability of the Council”



KEY RESULT AREA 04: LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

“A place based approach to delivering infrastructure and services”



KEY RESULT AREA 05: BEST VALUE

“Frameworks that deliver best value services to the community”



KEY RESULT AREA 06: ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

“Strengthening organisational capacity and resilience”



KEY RESULT AREA 07: PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

“Planning for the social, economic and environmental betterment of the Shire”



KEY RESULT AREA 08: LESSONS LEARNED

“Implementing lessons from the Public Inquiry and Independent Reviews”



KEY RESULT AREA 01: GOVERNANCE

Rebuilding Trust Through Transparency

Transparency in local government is crucial for fostering trust, accountability, and effective community engagement.

An immediate priority for the Administrator was to restore public confidence in Council decision making processes and outcomes. A key objective was to return decision making on key community issues to the public domain.

To achieve this, several key activities were undertaken in parallel to ensure information was more broadly accessible, feedback on consultation processes was timely and the reasons for decisions clear.

Activities undertaken during Administration include:

- Ensuring Council meetings and public forums, including workshops and briefings are open and accessible
- Increasing the type of information publicly available on the Council website including but not limited to development assessments; their status, progress and outcomes of determinations
- Expanding Council's social media and online presence to communicate key projects, decisions and community engagement opportunities more broadly, while accepting not all residents have access to this form of media
- Webcasting Council meetings and making changes to the Council's Code of Meeting Practice with respect to pre-meeting briefing sessions, workshops and information sessions
- Introducing more face to face engagement from the Administrator level down including Listening Tours, Village Visits and Local Matters forums
- Adopting a new Customer Experience and Standards Charter to set clear expectations for service delivery and support a culture of excellence in customer service
- Upgrading the Council online engagement platform to create a more visual and user-friendly experience that includes information about consultations in train and decision-making timeframes
- Integrating systems and processes and improving data (ongoing), to ensure the Council's website provides users with reliable, timely, accurate information
- Introducing a Development Assessment e-Tracker as a single source of truth for the status of Development Applications (DAs)
- Developing an interactive projects page on the Council's website to provide the community with immediate information about infrastructure projects; their location, description, status and overall progress
- Ensuring any residents who makes a submission in relation to a matter before Council is informed in a timely matter of the Council meeting at which the matter will be determined

Another key activity was the restructuring of key planning and reporting documents such as the annual Operational Plan and Budget to provide detailed budgets for each and every Principal Activity (Coordinator Level) carried out by Council, i.e. showing the true cost of each service and how that service is funded.



“Responsible leadership and transparency in decision making”

The adoption of the 2024/25 Operational Plan and Budget is the first time the organisation has provided this level of detail on the services provided; the costs of these services and how and to what extent services are delivered.

Understanding the costs and activities of services helps the Council make better informed decisions about resource allocation. It also informs discussions with the community about levels of service and what is both affordable and acceptable given resources are limited and therefore need to be prioritised.

Promoting Good Governance

A key initiative of the Administrator was the creation of an internal ombudsman role to ensure probity, accountability and ethical conduct.

The Professional Conduct Coordinator role (internal ombudsman) was introduced in 2021 and investigates complaints relating to Council staff, contractors, consultants and volunteers across four areas:

1. Alleged corrupt conduct
2. Maladministration
3. Serious or substantial waste of public money
4. Breaches of code of conduct

The position also plays a proactive role in the prevention of unethical or corrupt conduct through education and policy advice. The role is independent of the Administrator and General Manager.

In April 2021, Council passed a resolution for the establishment of the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) and the adoption of Terms of Reference for the Committee.

In July 2021 Council appointed four independent members to the ARIC for a three year period from 1 September, to provide independent advice and assurance to the General Manager and Council on aspects of Council operations including but not limited to:

- Compliance
- Risk management
- Fraud control
- Financial management
- Governance
- Implementation of strategies and plans
- Service reviews
- Collection of performance data
- Internal audits

The organisation also adhered to its commitment of undertaking at least four Internal Audits each year, including conducting informal ‘health checks’.

Examples of Internal Audits conducted include: Procurement processes and compliance, Policy compliance; and Human Resources processes and controls.

Health Checks included: Development Assessment processes, customer service processes and cyber security governance.

As the ARIC membership is due to expire on 1 September 2024, the four independent members were reappointed with a staggered term end date at the June 2024 Council meeting. Reappointing the current members provides stability while the newly elected Council are onboarded and inducted. This will ensure that knowledge of the Council’s operations, financial reporting, structure and other important aspects are not lost when members change and the ARIC independence is maintained.

Frameworks for Decision-making

Council has a range of policies and related procedures that bring uniformity and consistency to how it operates and makes decisions.

In 2021, it was recognised that many key policies were out of date and in need of urgent review.

A review program was established with the aim of completing key reviews prior to September 2024. This would better enable the incoming Council to 'hit the ground running' by providing contemporary policies reflective of the current environment.

Over 50 policy reviews have been conducted during Administration with a view to ensuring the parameters of Council decision-making are clear and fit for purpose.

Examples of policies reviewed under Administration include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Acknowledgement of Country
- Assessment of Development Applications
- Asset Management
- Asbestos Management
- Cash Investment
- Code of Conduct
- Code of Meeting Practice
- Compliance and Enforcement
- Community Engagement
- Councillor and Staff Interaction
- Debt Recovery
- Financial Reserves
- Feedback and Complaints
- Fraud and Corruption Prevention
- Grants, Donations and Sponsorship
- Loan Borrowings
- Notification of Development Proposals
- Procurement
- Property Investment
- Public Interest Disclosures
- Public Art
- Social Media
- Stormwater Management
- Urban Tree Management

Independent Reviews

In the early months of Administration following discussions with residents, suspended councillors and staff (including staff exited from the organisation prior to March 2021) and a due process 12 independent reviews were commissioned by the Administrator covering areas such as Council finances, planning and development, regulatory services and Council's response to the 2019/20 bushfires.

The purpose of initiating such reviews was to provide independent analysis of several complex issues and provide recommendations for improvements.

Again, these reviews would enable the Administrator in discussion with the General Manager, to take immediate corrective action where necessary while providing the future Council with an evidence base for change.

All reviews included recommendations for action by Council with the exception of the Wombeyan Caves Road Expenditure Review.

Substantial progress has been made in implementing over 200 recommendations arising from the reviews.

The independent review into Governance, Human Resources and Statutory Reporting proposed 27 improvements to Governance alone, and 52 recommendations overall.

Of the total number of Governance related recommendations 31 have already been completed, nine are complete but with ongoing action required, 11 are in progress and one has not yet commenced.

A priority recommendation from the Governance review was the need to review delegations. This resulted in a significant amount of work undertaken across the organisation to ensure delegations were appropriate and clear and that staff members were aware of the roles, responsibilities and the level of authority attached to their roles.

All of the reviews highlighted failures of the past by not only the previous governing body but the statutory obligations of former General Managers, senior and support staff.

The reviews together with the General Manager's Organisational Roadmap (refer to Key Result Area 6) were acknowledged in the Public Inquiry Report.

Status of Independent Reviews and Public Inquiry Recommendations as of June 2024

Review	Total Recommendations	Complete No further action required	Complete Ongoing action required	In Progress	Not yet commenced
Review of Council Finances – Final Report April 2021	11	6	5	0	0
Review of Governance, Human Resources and Statutory Reporting - May 2021	52	31	9	11	1
Tourism and Economic Development Expenditure Review - June 2021	6	1	4	1	0
Wombeyan Caves Road Expenditure Review - June 2021	0	0	0	0	0
Purchase Card Review - June 2021	2	0	1	1	0
Report on the Economic Development Roundtable - July 2021	4	2	0	2	0
Animal Shelter Review - July 2021	24	13	4	7	0
Review of Domestic Waste Management Reserve Review - September 2021	2	0	2	0	0
Review of Planning, Development and Regulatory Services - June, July and November 2021	27	23	3	1	0
Review of Community Advisory and Section 355 Committee Review - November 2021	13	11	1	1	0
Review of Council's Response to 2019/20 Bushfires – 2021	73	33	35	5	0
Civic Centre Refurbishment Project Review – 2021	8	0	7	1	0
Public Inquiry	27	6	0	21	0
Total	249	126	71	51	1



KEY RESULT AREA 02: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A New Approach to Community Engagement

The Council's Community Engagement Strategy seeks to define how, when and who the Council engages with and why. It also includes information about how the community is engaged on planning and development matters.

In 2023 the Administrator commissioned a review of the Community Engagement Strategy, taking on board the findings of the Public Inquiry and recent Community Research which indicated a growing dissatisfaction with the level of public participation in Council decision-making processes.

The review methodology included researching best-practice approaches to engagement along with community feedback.

As a result, the Strategy now takes a principles-based approach to how the Council will engage the community.

The Community Engagement Strategy was adopted in April 2023. It includes specific objectives and strategic actions to be delivered by the Council in order to improve public participation. These include activities to:

- Ensure all sectors of the community have opportunities to participate in decision making
- Reduce barriers to community participation
- Strengthen Council's relationship with the community
- Increase Council's understanding of the Shire's many communities and their unique needs and priorities
- Continuously improve the Council's approach to community engagement

The Strategy, which can be located on the Council website, has been designed to meet the unique needs of the Wingecarribee community.

This includes employing targeted techniques that reflect how residents prefer to be engaged and ensuring opportunities to 'have your say' are genuine, accessible, inclusive and timely.

Importantly, the revised Strategy emphasises the need to keep people informed about how their input has been used and the final outcome.

It also provides staff with case studies, guidance and tools to assist them in designing, delivering and evaluating community engagement activities.

Community engagement training was delivered to key staff in February 2024 to support achievement of the Strategy and improve the quality of engagement processes and outcomes.



“Genuine opportunities for communities to have their say”

Community Reference Panels

In late 2022 the Administrator called for the establishment of Community Reference Panels.

The role of the Community Reference Panels would be to support Council in reviewing the vision, objectives and goals of the Community Strategic Plan and their translation to the Delivery Program through an active and ongoing community engagement program.

The Panels would apply local knowledge, critical thinking, and analysis to strategy development, with a view to increasing the community’s confidence in Council’s decision making; ensuring key strategy decisions are not made in isolation, but in genuine partnership with the community.

Expressions of Interest were sought from members of the community to participate in one of four Panels, reflecting the themes in the Community Strategic Plan:

1. Climate Change and Environment
2. Community
3. Sport, Recreation and Leisure
4. Economy

The Panels were formally introduced in April of 2023 and continued in the absence of an elected governing body to provide direct input towards future strategy and planning.

Village Visits

In an environment where local government relies heavily on the use of digital media to communicate and engage with a broad range of stakeholders, the Administrator made an effort to increase face to face engagement.

This allows for more personable and in depth discussions and helps to remove barriers for those people who are unfamiliar with digital technology or hesitant to engage online.

Initiatives introduced during Administration included Village Visits and Listening Tours; both of which were designed for the Administrator and senior staff to hear first-hand from the community.

The Village Visits, a program of one on one meetings with the Administrator to discuss local matters, were held prior to formal Community Association meetings and provided the Administrator with a better understanding of local issues.

The Visits acknowledged the valuable role that independent Community Associations play in advocating for local services and the depth and breadth of ideas and local knowledge these groups have to offer.

Executive Listening and “reconnect” Tours, as well as Local Matters Forums were also initiated with over 30 meetings held across towns and villages. Participation was open to all members of the community and provided an opportunity for people to hear about Council services, infrastructure projects, and policy or strategy in development.

These initiatives have helped to build new relationships and foster a greater understanding between participants.

Place-based Engagement

A new Place Liaison Officer role was created during Administration to act as a conduit between local community groups and Council.

Over the past two years, the Place Liaison Officer has built positive relationships within the community and provided support to initiate and progress local projects.

The role supports a place-based approach to planning and service delivery, with a focus on providing village residents with easy access to support and information.

It also provides an important 'feedback loop' on key projects and advocacy issues, keeping residents and business owners up to date on priority initiatives.

The role has proved extremely popular amongst village residents and therefore funding has been allocated towards its continuance into the foreseeable future.

In keeping with a place-based approach to planning, the Robertson Village Place Plan was developed across 2023 and 2024.

The Plan, a collaborative effort between Council officers and the community, addresses the housing, economic, social and cultural needs of Robertson, both now and into the future.

As a place-plan it is intended to celebrate what people love most about the village they live in, enhance the existing village centre and create opportunities that work towards the long-term vision.

A mix of community engagement methods was used to actively involve the community in the Plan's development: an approach which resulted in the Plan winning the 2023 Local Government NSW Award for Excellence in Planning and Development Services.



Nepalese Event

The Nepalese community is one of the fastest growing migrant communities in Australia, and Wingecarribee Shire is fortunate to have an increasing number of Nepali who call the Shire home. Celebrating the rich traditions and perspectives of the Nepalese community in Wingecarribee will not only foster greater understanding and inclusivity but also enrich the cultural fabric of the area. The annual celebration starting in March 2025 will provide an opportunity to bring everyone together and highlight the diverse contributions of the Nepalese community.

Participate Wingecarribee

In keeping with the new Community Engagement Strategy, Council revamped its online community engagement platform, transitioning the former 'Your Say Wingecarribee' pages to a new improved platform called 'Participate Wingecarribee.'

The new consultation platform allows people to provide input towards projects, services and plans by completing online surveys, providing feedback and making formal submissions.

The new platform is vibrant, interactive and easier to use, resulting in an increase in online participation numbers.

At the time of preparing this Report, work was continuing on the development of a dedicated place-portal within the Participate platform. This section of the platform will provide residents with information specific to their town or village.

Examples of policies and projects that have been informed by the community via the online engagement platform include:

- Moss Vale Bypass
- Penrose Village Park Plan
- Community Strategic Plan
- Environment and Climate Change Strategy
- Code of Meeting Practice
- Robertson Village Place Plan
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Fees and Charges
- Councillor and Staff Interaction Policy
- Media Policy
- Bowral Memorial Hall
- Annual Operational Plan and Budget
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Low Density Residential Development Controls
- Southern Highlands Innovation Park
- Bowral South New Living Area
- Liquid Trade Waste Policy
- Bowral Town Centre Master Plan
- Street Tree Master Plans
- Plans of Management for Mount Gibraltar Heritage Reserve
- Centennial Park Concept Master Plan
- Customer Experience Standards and Charter
- Farmland Rating Policy
- Integrated Transport Strategy
- Conservation Management Plans
- Amendments to the Local Environment Plan 2010
- Resourcing Strategy including the Long Term Financial Plan
- Community Heritage Study



Southern Highlands Visitor Economy Advisory Panel

In December 2023 Council resolved to establish the Southern Highlands Visitor Economy Advisory Panel (VEAP), The VEAP provides a forum for engagement, advice and recommendations for developing a robust visitor economy and creating effective networks and partnerships between Wingecarribee Shire Council (WSC), visitor economy stakeholders, community, and business. The VEAP provides a focus on industry trends, possible future projects, programs, product development and advocacy ensuring Council plans meet current and future tourism demands, identifies visitor economy and tourism opportunities that support growth and sustainability of the local tourism operators, community and businesses.

The VEAP has been delegated to develop and implement a Visitor Economy Action Plan that aligns with the goals of the Destination Strategy 2020 – 2030.

Nine VEAP members were appointed at the June 2024 Council meeting for a two year period and an induction held in July 2024.



KEY RESULT AREA 03: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Budget Transparency

Securing the longer term financial sustainability of the Council requires ongoing commitment and attention.

While several key initiatives were progressed under Administration, ensuring financial sustainability is an ongoing function and core responsibility of all future governing bodies.

To ensure full visibility of the Council's budget and financial situation, changes were made during Administration to provide the community and incoming Council with unprecedented transparency of the cost of delivering services, as seen in documents such as the annual Operational Plan and Budget and Quarterly Budget Review Statements, which, for the first time, show service budgets down to Coordinator level (Level 4).

This detail of information will prove invaluable to the Council when engaging the community on affordable and acceptable levels of service and determining future resourcing priorities.

Managing Financial Pressures

In recent years both Council and the community have been impacted by numerous events that have in turn placed unprecedented pressure on Council's ability to deliver a financially and socially responsible budget.

Issues impacting the budget have included:

- The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting shut down and pivoting of certain services, along with disruptions to the supply chain
- Formally declared natural disasters including extreme wet weather events
- Escalating damage to local infrastructure, such as roads, as result of these weather events
- Ongoing recovery efforts following the 2019/20 bushfires
- Cost of living pressures such as high inflation and interest rates
- Competing service priorities and the legacy of unfunded and delayed projects
- A local government revenue system (rate peg) which does not keep up with the cost of delivering local services
- The increased cost of maintaining infrastructure and growth in depreciation (17.79%) is greater than the IPART determined rate peg of 4.6% (2023/24 financial year)

Priority has been given to revisiting our short, medium and long term financial management practices and strategies in order to establish a stronger financial position that in turn builds the community's confidence in the Council's ability to responsibly manage the resources within its control.

Examples of activities undertaken during Administration include:

- Improving to Council's 10 year Resourcing Strategy, to ensure greater integration between the core components i.e. Council's Long Term Financial Plan, Asset Management Strategy, Digital Strategy and Workforce Management Strategy
- Developing the Delivering Better Services Framework to guide how we conduct Service Reviews and plan for future service delivery
- Implementing Service Reviews, in line with the new framework, to identify efficiencies and achieve best-value for the community. Reviews undertaken during Administration include Finance Services, Water Services and the Animal Shelter with a full program of reviews to be commence in the 2024/25 financial year
- Reviewing and updating Council's Operational Plan and Budget process to improve accountability and resource management at the service level and better align annual service priorities with financial, workforce, asset and digital resources

“Securing the long term financial sustainability of the Council”

- Completing an Independent Review into Council’s finances and implementing the subsequent recommendations
- Improving how we monitor and report on Council’s budget, for example, publishing detailed service costs, including the number of Full Time Equivalent staff delivering each service, as part of the Operational Plan and Budget plus:
 - Quarterly budget adjustments that are greater than \$20K are now reported in the body of any reports to Council (with narrative), as well as in the accompanying Quarterly Budget Review Statement, to ensure the adjustments are easily identified and the reasons behind them are understood
 - Introducing of Monthly Financial Reporting (including actuals) to ensure timely public updates on Council’s financial position, including the capital works budget
 - Providing detailed listings of Council’s Capital Works Program in the Operational Plan and Budget, down to the individual project level, in order to clearly identify which projects will be delivered in any given year

Legacy Projects

Since 2021, Council has addressed a number of large-scale legacy projects, including matters that should have been resolved or completed in prior years, but were delayed placing unforeseen pressures on Council’s budget.

Projects that were delayed, but have since been progressed include:

- \$10 million - New Animal Shelter and State Emergency Services facility
- \$18 million - Former Welby Tip site remediation
- \$54 million - Bowral Sewage Treatment – Upgrade to support population growth
- \$65 million - Moss Vale Sewage Treatment Plant - Upgrade to support population growth

These large-scale projects now have sound funding strategies in place and have been incorporated in Council’s Long Term Financial Plan.

Independent Review

The Robert Finch Review into Council’s finances, commissioned by the Administrator in April 2021, focused on the management of Council’s finances and resulted in a number of recommendations.

The Review was specifically designed to consider:

1. Council’s financial position, Resourcing Strategy, maintenance of basic infrastructure, rates of depreciation versus asset replacement and the capacity to deliver projects identified in the Operational Plan and Delivery Program
2. Expenditure under Council’s Special Rate Variations (SRVs) to ensure compliance with approvals
3. Funding of the Council’s Civic Centre Refurbishment Project

A key finding of the Robert Finch review was to establish a Reserves Policy, which saw the rationalisation of a number of internally restricted reserves, and an unrestricted working capital of \$5 million.

The Financial Reserves Policy has now been both adopted and implemented and the forecast unrestricted working capital will be \$6 million as at 30 June 2024.

The full report including recommendations can be found on Council’s website.

Financial Performance

Council's financial position at the end of the 2022/23 financial year was strong, exceeding five of the six ratios. These trends will continue in Council's Long Term Financial Plan.

The Operating Performance ratio did not meet the benchmark, as the growth in depreciation as a result of asset revaluations was greater than the rate peg attributed to that financial year.

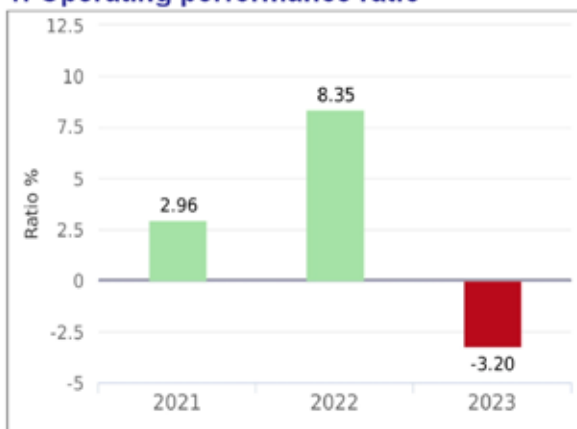
So long as the rate peg remains less than the growth in depreciation, this will remain an ongoing issue for future Councils as it is for most councils in the State.

At the time of writing this report, our 2023/24 results were not available. Results will be published as part of the Annual Report in November 2024.

However, to assist the recent Candidate Information Session, Council's current financial position was independently reviewed and presented to potential candidates. The review demonstrated Council maintains a strong financial position, with a revised working capital benchmark of \$5.8 million. This was established to ensure prudent financial management and Council having a buffer to mitigate financial risks. As with all NSW councils, a number of challenges still remain in light of the current economic pressures, cost shifting and the continuation of the rate peg to deliver existing services in a sustainable manner.

The Administrator has been advised that the draft Financial Statements will be tabled to an Extraordinary Council meeting in September 2024 to be released for audit by the NSW Auditor General's Office.

1. Operating performance ratio



Benchmark: — > 0.00%

Source of benchmark: Code of Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting

Purpose of operating performance ratio

This ratio measures Council's achievement of containing operating expenditure within operating revenue.

Commentary on 2022/23 result

2022/23 ratio (3.20)%

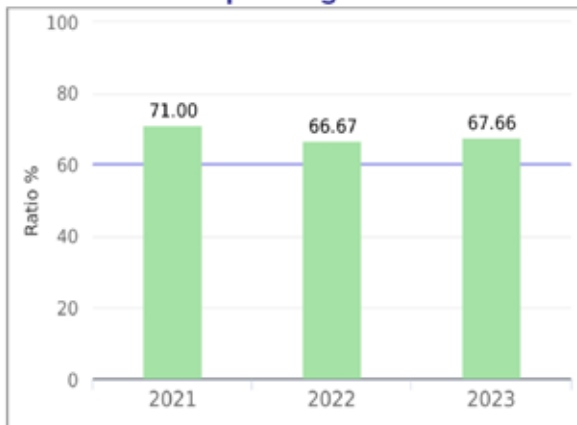
The operating performance ratio is below the benchmark by 3.20%, which is predominately attributable to:

- increased depreciation expense resulting from high asset values
- additional resources to reduce the backlog of development applications

Ratio achieves benchmark

Ratio is outside benchmark

2. Own source operating revenue ratio



Benchmark: — > 60.00%

Source of benchmark: Code of Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting

Purpose of own source operating revenue ratio

This ratio measures fiscal flexibility. It is the degree of reliance on external funding sources such as operating grants and contributions.

Commentary on 2022/23 result

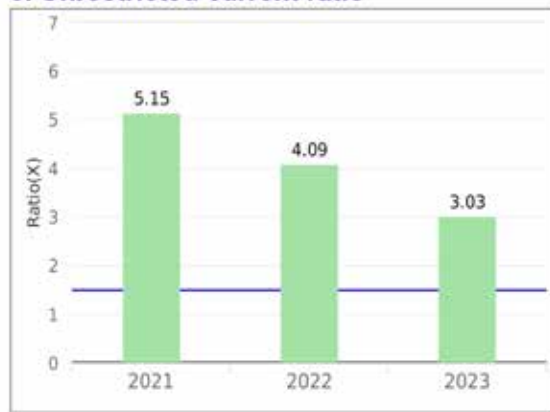
2022/23 ratio 67.66%

Council continues to exceed this industry benchmark with 67.66% of revenue generated through rates, charges and user fees.

Ratio achieves benchmark

Ratio is outside benchmark

3. Unrestricted current ratio



Purpose of unrestricted current ratio

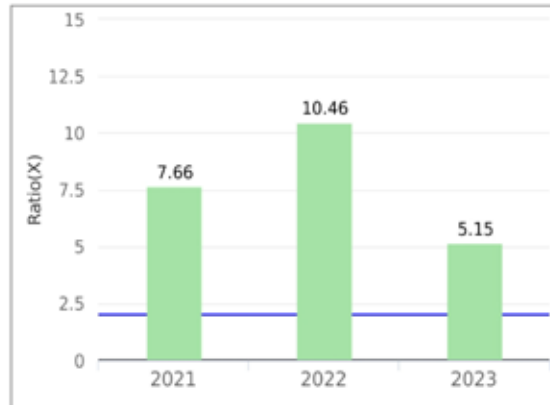
To assess the adequacy of working capital and its ability to satisfy obligations in the short term for the unrestricted activities of Council.

Commentary on 2022/23 result

2022/23 ratio 3.03x

Council continues to maintain a strong liquidity position with a healthy unrestricted current ratio. This means that Council can easily pay its financial obligations as they fall due.

4. Debt service cover ratio



Purpose of debt service cover ratio

This ratio measures the availability of operating cash to service debt including interest, principal and lease payments

Commentary on 2022/23 result

2022/23 ratio 5.15x

Council continues to exceed this benchmark which is a result of adequate operating revenues to cover its loan repayments.

The reason for the lower ratio is because Council repaid the outstanding balance of \$2.7M on the Robertson Sewerage Scheme loan 10 years before loan maturity.

Council did not take out any new borrowings during the year.

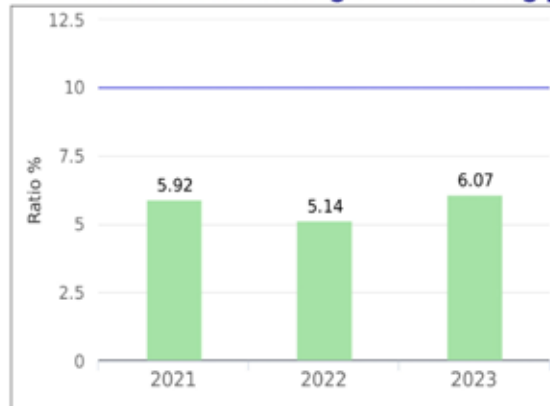
Benchmark: — > 2.00x

Source of benchmark: Code of Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting

Ratio achieves benchmark

Ratio is outside benchmark

5. Rates and annual charges outstanding percentage



Purpose of rates and annual charges outstanding percentage

To assess the impact of uncollected rates and annual charges on Council's liquidity and the adequacy of recovery efforts.

Commentary on 2022/23 result

2022/23 ratio 6.07%

This ratio has remained relatively high due to Council not actively pursuing debt recovery under its COVID-19 relief package for community and business. Residents and businesses of the Wingecarribee Shire impacted by COVID-19 were able to defer rates payments during the pandemic.

Council has commenced debt recovery procedures and this ratio is expected to reduce in the next reporting period.

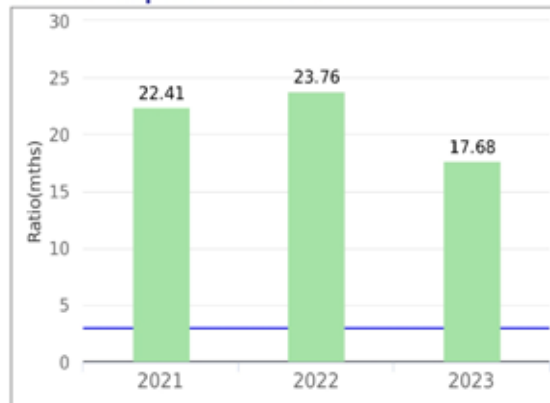
Benchmark: — < 10.00%

Source of benchmark: Code of Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting

Ratio achieves benchmark

Ratio is outside benchmark

6. Cash expense cover ratio



Purpose of cash expense cover ratio

This liquidity ratio indicates the number of months a Council can continue paying for its immediate expenses without additional cash inflow.

Commentary on 2022/23 result

2022/23 ratio 17.68 months

This ratio is significantly higher than benchmark which reflects Council's strong liquidity position.

Benchmark: — > 3.00months

Source of benchmark: Code of Accounting Practice and Financial Reporting

Ratio achieves benchmark

Ratio is outside benchmark



KEY RESULT AREA 04:

LOCAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A priority for the Administrator has been the progression of important infrastructure projects, many of which had stalled as a result of the Council's dysfunction. Overall, the Administrator identified a long term under investment in asset maintenance, renewal and new infrastructure, significant progress has been made during the Administration period to address these matters.

The following provides a snap shot of major projects and initiatives that have been completed or well-progressed during Administration.

A Strategic Approach to Asset Management

Many of the services provided by Council are supported by infrastructure.

A key responsibility of Council is to ensure that these assets are meeting affordable and acceptable levels of service and are sustainable into the longer term.

Council manages an asset register of six asset classes, consisting of over 157,000 assets with a combined value of approximately \$2.7 billion

Examples of assets include community buildings, sports fields, parks, carparks, roads, bridges, stormwater pits, footpaths and water treatment plants.

In 2022 Council's Asset Management Strategy was reviewed to apply a consistent approach to how assets are managed, planned, created, operated, maintained, renewed and disposed.

The goals of the updated Strategy are to:

- Improve the sustainability of the assets under Council's control
- Deliver levels of services to the community that are both affordable and acceptable
- Ensure our assets are reliable, safe and fit for purpose
- Continuously improve how we manage our risk
- Allocate appropriate resources to asset management
- Support staff to undertake responsible asset management
- Achieve best practice asset management
- Meet legislative requirements

It provides a comprehensive explanation of the condition of Council's assets, strategies to maintain and improve assets and the funds required to meet expected levels of service.

It is an important strategic document that will provide the incoming Council with an evidence base for making decisions about future resource allocation and levels of service.

In June 2024, Council adopted for the first time a suite of Asset Management Plans to support the effective implementation of the overall Strategy.

Aquatics and Indoor Multipurpose Facilities

Following the adoption of the Community and Recreation Facilities Strategy, Council resolved to develop business cases for the provision of a multi-purpose indoor sporting facility and an Aquatics Plan.

The Plan and business cases are critical to ensure evidence-based decision making for the Shire's future infrastructure requirements to withstand scrutiny of developer contribution levies in the Land and Environment Court when Development Contributions Plans may be challenged.

At the July 2024 meeting, Council resolved to place the draft Aquatics Plan and Business Cases for a Regional Aquatics Facility and for a multipurpose indoor sports facility at the Mittagong Oval Precinct on public exhibition. The outcomes of the public exhibition will be reported to the new Council for determination.

“A place based approach to delivering infrastructure and services”

Capital Works

During Administration over \$200 million has been delivered in capital works projects including maintenance and renewal works with a further \$405 million committed across a 4 Year Capital Works Program.

Highlights of projects completed or well progressed during Administration include:

Buildings

- Bowral Memorial Hall Refurbishment
- Southern Regional Livestock Exchange Upgrade
- Animal Shelter and State Emergency Services
- Moss Vale Emergency Operations Centre
- Rural Fire Service Water Storage Tanks – Penrose, Balmoral, Waganderry, Wingello
- Bundanoon Soldiers Memorial Hall Roof Renewal

Open Spaces

- Bong Bong Common Upgrade
- Casburn Park Upgrade
- Local Playspace Renewals and Upgrades
 - Seymour Park Moss Vale
 - Cook St Mittagong
 - Church Rd Oval Moss Vale
 - Ritchie Park Moss Vale
 - Railway Park Colo Vale
 - Railway Park Hill Top
- Balmoral Reserve Upgrade
- Jordans Crossing Dog Park
- Station Street Camelia Gardens
- Loseby Park Lighting Renewal
- Loseby Park Tennis Court Renewal
- Eridge Park Netball Courts Lighting Renewal

Bridge Renewals

- Merrigang St Bridge
- Diamonds Field Road Bridge
- Burrawang Creek Bridge
- Ritters Creek Bridge

Road Renewals and Upgrades

- Station Street Renewal
- New Station Street Carpark
- Old South Road Renewal and Upgrade
- Range Road Renewal and Upgrade
- Wombeyan Caves Road Upgrade
- Wilson Drive Colo Vale
- Berrima Road Moss Vale
- Taylor Avenue New Berrima

- Eridge Park Road Renewal and Upgrade
- Kirkham Street Road Renewal and Upgrade
- Sallys Corner Road
- Throsby Street Moss Vale Renewal
- Exeter Road Renewal and Upgrade
- Bowral Lookout Access Roads and Carpark
- Colo St and Range Rd Intersection Upgrade
- School Zone Pedestrian Crossing Upgrades
- Moss Vale Bypass Detailed Design (in progress)

New Footpaths and Shared Paths

- Wilson Drive Balmoral
- Ellsmore Road Bundanoon
- Erith Street Bundanoon
- Railway Ave Colo Vale
- Church St Colo Vale
- Mittagong Road Bowral
- Emily Circuit Bowral
- Eridge Park Road Shared Path
- Illawarra Highway Footpath Moss Vale
- Bessemer St and Lee St Mittagong
- Queen St Mittagong

Drainage Renewal and Upgrades

- Retford Farm Detention Basin
- Jasmine St Colo Vale
- Prince St Mittagong
- Argyle St and Howard St New Berrima
- Ella St Hill Top
- Hood St Mittagong

Water Supply

- Water Main Renewals
- Water Filling Stations
- Bundanoon and Medway Dam Safety Upgrades
- Power Generators for Treatment Plant

Wastewater Network

- Bowral Sewage Treatment Plant Upgrade
- Moss Vale Sewage Treatment Plant Upgrade
- Sewer Main Renewals
- Pump Station Upgrades

Local Roads

Since March 2021 the organisation has prioritised maintaining and renewing essential infrastructure while also progressing investment in new assets.

Particular focus has been given to our road network given the high level of importance placed by the community on transport infrastructure and a declining level of satisfaction with local roads.

It is important to note that the Shire, along with the Illawarra councils and Upper Lachlan Shire, has experienced the highest number of formally declared natural disasters in NSW the over the past four and a half years.

This has had an extraordinary impact on communities, including the condition of local infrastructure, in particular local roads.

In the face of unprecedented natural disasters, the organisation has remained committed to providing a safe and reliable local road network.



In October 2022, Council established a Pot Hole Crew; a team of five dedicated to tending to damage left in the wake of record-breaking rainfall events. The new team boosted existing crews that worked for months repairing extensive damage across more than 1,200 kilometres of road network. This \$1.3 million per year funding increase for three years is on top of the more than \$5.5 million already allocated annually to road maintenance and renewal.

Across the three years, Council not only invested an average of \$22 million per year in road renewal but is also addressing the root cause of the issue requiring the renewal enabling roads to be properly fixed rather than just patched. As result the organisation is back on track with managing road condition.

In 2023 Council engaged the services of industry experts, Infrastructure Management Group (IMG) to conduct a Shire wide condition inspection and road prioritisation. The 2024/25-2027/28 Capital Program has been developed in accordance with this audit.

In June 2024, a further \$44 million of road renewal works were committed across the new four-year program – after delivery of which it is estimated that only 1% of roads will be in Condition 4 or 5.

Old South Road

Old South Road is a local distributor road that connects the Old Hume Highway to residential areas east of Mittagong and Bowral town centres.

Several compounding issues, including weather events and increasing traffic volumes, had impacted the road over many years, resulting in the dilapidation of large sections of adjacent pavement, and the ongoing need for heavy maintenance patching.

Construction commenced on Old South Road in 2023 to make it safe and smooth for travel. Works involved road pavement widening and rehabilitation, installation of guardrails, construction of stormwater pits and pipes and other associated works.

After years of neglect, the \$19 million Old South Road Rehabilitation Project was completed July 2024 and provides improved traffic flow, a safer and more enjoyable ride for motorists and easier access between residential areas and town centres.



Bowral Memorial Hall

In December 2022, Council secured \$250,000 in funding from the State Government to complete improvements to the much loved Bowral Memorial Hall. This came in addition to \$2.8 million in Australian Government funding and \$5.6 million committed by the Council.

The 135 year old heritage building has experienced a complete transformation and is now the only venue of its kind in the Shire, with a capacity of 300, including retractable seating for 125, quality acoustics and highly adaptable spaces.

The refurbishment vastly increases the Hall's usefulness and boosts annual revenue.

Most importantly, it now serves as an important arts and cultural space for residents and visitors, attracting a variety of quality performances and shows.

A fee structure has been designed to balance keeping the venue accessible to community groups while generating the revenue needed to maintain the new facilities to a high standard.

The Hall reopened to the community in June 2023.



Station Street, Bowral

In March 2023, after years of delays and community lobbying for better facilities, Council completed upgrades to Station Street, Bowral.

Upgrades included the construction of new road pavement and water mains, kerb and gutter renewal, footpath improvements, upgraded train station car park and additional car parking spaces at the southern end of Station Street. Additionally, dangerous open drains were removed together with asbestos pipes in the road reserve

The upgrades have vastly improved parking, local roads and footpaths and the overall experience of the precinct.

The use of an innovative product in EME2 drastically reduced costs for removal and disposal of coal tar as well as significantly decreased the time required for construction.

The outcome is vastly improved movement around Bowral, at a fraction of the original cost, without compromising the charm and character of the town.

The reenvisioned project cost close to \$8 million, a much more cost effective exercise than \$33 million unfunded project in progress prior to the suspension of Councillors in March 2021.

In addition to road, footpath and other infrastructure works, Council also upgraded Station Street's Heritage Camellia Beds and enabled the beauty of the avenue of pin oaks to be retained.

Works included installing irrigation systems, meticulously reconstructing stone walls, restoring lighting infrastructures, and introducing additional camellia plantings.

The revitalised and much cherished garden beds are now preserved (and soon to be heritage listed), acknowledging the important part they play in Bowral's history.



Kirkham Street Reconstruction

The reconstruction of busy Kirkham Street in Moss Vale was completed in June 2023, making it easier for workers, students, and residents to move around.

People attending TAFE, the Council Civic Centre, the Moss Vale War Memorial Aquatic Centre, Coles Supermarket, and motorists passing through, can now fully utilise this completely renovated road and enjoy decreased travel times during peak hours.

The project cost of around \$1.8million, was funded in majority by Transport for NSW through a grant of \$1.25 million and was completed under the predicted budget.

Funding was obtained as a result of Council's successful application to the Fixing Local Roads Fund and has transformed the road pavement, which was in very poor condition, along with the drainage, damaged kerb, and missing road markings.

Mittagong Creek Bridge

The reconstruction of the Mittagong Creek Bridge located on Merrigang Street was completed in May 2023.

After nearly a century of service, the bridge was beginning to show its age with visible signs of wear and tear.

The bridge was replaced and now fulfills requirements for heavy-duty vehicles.

The surroundings of the bridge were also taken into account with the design of the structure incorporating elements to safeguard the embankments from erosion and battering, both upstream and downstream.

The project cost just over \$1.2 million and was majority funded by the NSW Government, through the Fixing Country Bridges Grant program.



New Animal Shelter and State Emergency Services (SES) Facility

In June 2023, Council announced that Puch Building and Constructions Pty Ltd, had been successful in securing the contract to deliver a new Southern Highlands Animal Shelter and State Emergency Services (SES) facility.

The new \$10 million facility will have capacity to house over 90 companion-animals. It will be based on best practice for animal care and re-homing and include contemporary design features.

The Animal Shelter/SES initiative represents a collaborative effort to create a modern and functional space for both animal shelter staff and SES personnel.

The improved facilities will enhance animal care and ensure that dedicated State Emergency Services teams have the resources they need to keep the community safe.

The target date for completion is November 2024.



Bowral and Moss Vale Sewage Treatment Plants

The \$65 million Moss Vale Sewage Treatment Plant project marks a historic milestone as the largest single contract ever awarded by the Council.

This comprehensive rebuild will expand the plant's capacity to meet the demands of Moss Vale's ongoing development and the Southern Highlands Innovation Park (SHIP).

Work continues to progress, with the design completed and the tender for construction works announced at the May 2023 Ordinary Council Meeting.

In the meantime, the \$54 million upgrades to the Bowral Sewage Treatment Plant are also underway to ensure the service is reliable and effective into the long term.

Works commenced in June 2023 and given the scope and complexity of the project will take approximately two years to complete.

The Mittagong Sewage Treatment Plant is also due to be upgraded with the design phase now underway.

Upgrades will:

- Improve process and operational performance
- Provide treatment capacity to meet current and future population demands in the catchment
- Provide treatment infrastructure to meet environmental objectives from the regulator
- Protect the sensitive environment (Wingecarribee River via Whites Creek) that the plant discharges into



Mittagong Playhouse

The Mittagong Memorial Hall (the Playhouse) is a heritage listed building with high social and architectural significance. The Mittagong Playhouse is the only publicly owned and dedicated theatre within the Southern Highlands. It has been well utilised over the years, hosting highly successful adult and youth productions.

Unfortunately, due to a serious structural fault on the western side of the building, the Mittagong Playhouse had to close in late 2019.

A project to restore the Mittagong Memorial Hall's structural integrity is now underway and will include design and construction works required to make the venue safe, meet compliance standards and renew the facility for future generations whilst retaining the heritage values of the building.

The reopening of the Playhouse has been a priority under Administration. Progress to date includes:

- Extensive onsite investigations conducted by specialised consultants
- Floorplan layout agreement and signoff by Stakeholders and User Groups
- Preparation of tender documentation and drawings
- Approval of a Development Application for building refurbishment (June 2023)

In June 2024 Council adopted a Four-Year Capital Works Program, where it is envisaged that construction will be delivered across 2025/26 and 2026/27, funded by a combination of loans and anticipated grants. Competitive grant submissions have been submitted to Federal and State Government programs, and further opportunities will continue to be pursued.

Retford Farm Detention Basin

This \$6 million project near Bowral is a major flood mitigation initiative involving Council and the Federal Government.

Designed to safeguard the township against the risks of flooding, the project involves the construction of a large basin capable of holding 320 million litres of water during a 1-in-100-year flood event.

The volume is equivalent to 128 Olympic sized swimming pools.

Water will be temporarily stored and then released in a controlled manner through a piped structure, significantly reducing the flood peak and protecting homes and businesses.

At the time of writing this report the project was well progressed and on track for completion in the third quarter of 2024.



David Wood Inclusive Adventure Playground

The David Wood play space, an all-inclusive playground slated for completion in May 2025, promises to be one of the Shire's most popular recreational areas.

The \$1.4 million project is funded in partnership with the NSW Government under the Stronger Country Communities Fund and with local community group The 4K who work to provide a significantly better environment for children with special needs.

This project will deliver:

- a main playspace area
- learn to ride, pump track and advanced play course
- a flying fox
- park furniture and footpath connections

The project promises to be a best-practice example of collaboration between Council and the local community in the co-design of accessible and welcoming community spaces.



Bong Bong Common

Bong Bong Common is a historic site that now features an accessible pathway, cycleway, seating, walking, and scenic riverfront settings.

In 2023, works commenced to upgrade the Common to include new playspace areas, improved car parking, public toilets and other features to improve the area's amenity and riverfront access and highlight the site's significance to both Aboriginal and European histories.

The upgrade works were completed, and Bong Bong Common was opened to the public late 2023.

Also in 2023 Council committed to Council commence due diligence investigations (including a cost analysis) on the feasibility of constructing a shared path that adjoins Bong Bong Common and Cecil Hoskins Nature Reserve to the emerging Bowral South New Living Area along the Wingecarribee river front. This is intended to strengthen broader connectivity between the three (3) town centres and supports the strategic direction of encouraging safe and accessible active transport opportunities in the Shire.



Mountain Biking and Welby Landfill Remediation

Unauthorised mountain bike trails at Mount Gibraltar came to Council's attention during 2023. Following considerable community interest, an environmental assessment of the unauthorised trails at Mount Gibraltar found them to not be viable and they have since been decommissioned. In collaboration with stakeholders, at the March 2024 Council meeting, the future approach to how Council would support mountain biking in the Shire was outlined. This included:

- Remediation of the Welby Landfill site, including preparation of a Landfill Closure Plan to allow in the future for a Mountain Bike Jump Park (subject to receipt of grant funding)
- Construction of a new Welby Downhill Mountain Bike Track and revitalisation of the existing Welby Mountain Bike Track
- Development of a Masterplan to identify opportunities to develop a regional mountain biking facility at Mount Alexandra Reserve while ensuring protection and enhancement of environmental outcomes
- Reactivation of trails at Wingello State Forest by Highlands Trails and NSW Forestry

In support of the reactivation efforts of Wingello State Forest, Council was successful in the receipt of a \$400k Places to Play grant for the establishment of an adventure play space and shared path loop track. Council has completed the design phase of the project, and NSW Forestry will soon commence the construction phase.





KEY RESULT AREA 05: BEST VALUE

Meeting the Service Challenge

Achieving the right balance between affordable and acceptable levels of service is a challenging task.

This is because local governments are restricted in regard to how they raise revenue.

At the same time, the community has certain expectations about the quality of services provided, how services are delivered and the impact of delivering these services on people and the environment.

Rates are the Council's main source of income and are used to fund a multitude of services. In some cases, Council will charge fees for the use of services. The rate peg, which is set by the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales (IPART), determines how much rates can increase each year. Increases are generally not enough to meet growing demand or cover the costs of delivering services to the community.

This means that local government needs to be more innovative and efficient; sometimes delivering more year on year, but with less.

In 2023, the Administrator commissioned the development of a framework to address how the Council plans for and reviews the services it delivers, and how it aims to achieve best value. That is, providing services that are effective, accessible, efficient and affordable.

In December 2023, 'Delivering Better Services – A Framework for providing Best Value Services to the community' was adopted by Council. It provides the organisation with a consistent approach to undertaking service reviews and planning for future service delivery.

The Framework was developed over a period of several months and involved analysing the results of community engagement, better practice examples from across the local government sector and outcomes of recent service reviews.

It proposes a prioritised approach to undertaking service reviews to ensure all services are:

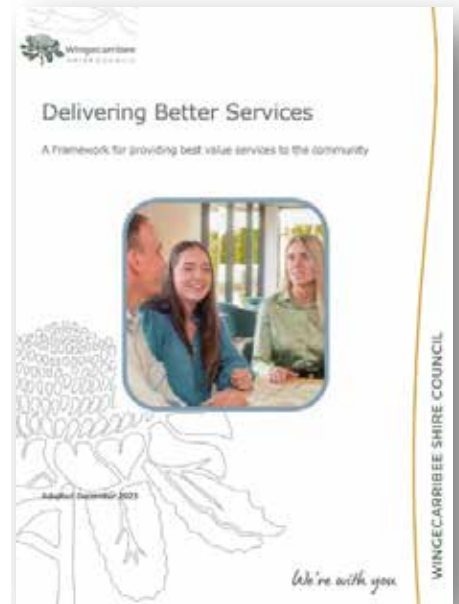
- Meeting agreed objectives
- Are well operated
- Are achieving a quality that is both acceptable and affordable and
- Provide fair access.

Under this Framework all Council run Service Areas are required to carry out short (1 year), medium (4 year), and long term (10 year) planning to achieve the vision in the Community Strategic Plan and improve community satisfaction with service delivery.

Planning for the immediate term, while keeping an eye on the future, encourages service managers, coordinators and staff, to think critically and strategically about service provision, the true costs of services and better manage risk.

It also builds an evidence base on which the Management and the Council can make more informed decisions about levels of service and resource allocation.

Council has been transitioning to comprehensive service planning since September 2022 with a view to having service plans in place for all Principal Activities (Coordinator level activities) by 2025.



“Frameworks that deliver best value services to the community”

Service Reviews

All Councils in NSW are required under legislation to undertake Service Reviews.

A Service Review is the process of considering the costs, quality and efficiency of a Council service and assessing the appropriateness of how the service is currently being delivered. The process also helps us to identify if the service is socially and environmentally responsible. It is a process of data collection that enables Council to make better informed decisions about the services it delivers.

A Service Review may result in small adjustments or significant changes to a service.

Under the new Framework, Council develops and implements a program of service reviews with the details to be provided in each new Delivery Program and annual Operational Plan and Budget.

In prioritising services for review the Council considers:

- Importance – the level of importance placed by the community or organisation on the service
- Satisfaction – the level of user satisfaction with the service
- Value – the cost of the service and return on investment
- Performance - results against agreed service measures, benchmarks and indicators
- Impact - of the service on the organisation, community, environment, and/or economy
- Risk – the severity, urgency and likelihood of issues impacting the service; for example, potential changes to legislation, funding arrangements or service delivery models
- Legislation – whether the service is required (or not) under local government legislation and any issues of non-compliance.

The program came into effect in 2024/25 and will be reviewed in consultation with the incoming Council.

Several Service Reviews were completed during Administration with the Financial Services review being the first to be completed under the new framework. Service Reviews undertaken include:

- Animal Shelter
- Children’s Services
- Corporate Relations
- Financial Services
- Plant and Fleet
- Southern Regional Livestock Exchange
- Tourism and Events
- Water Services

Service Reviews planned for 2024/25 include:

- Roads and Drainage Maintenance (including re-sheeting)
- Parks and Open Space Maintenance
- Building Maintenance
- Pools Management
- People and Culture
- Communications and Engagement



Community Research Surveys

Council facilitated two Community Research Surveys during Administration.

Similar surveys had been carried out regularly prior to Administration to understand community perceptions and priorities as well as compare Council's performance against like-sized local government areas.

Surveys were completed in late 2022, and again in 2024, to help inform the incoming Council (September 2024) and establish a baseline for improvement.

Over 400 people participated in each survey providing researchers with a sample profile of the broader community.

Results from the 2022 survey showed that awareness of the Administrator was high, with 94% of residents aware prior to completing the survey. Over two thirds of residents were at least somewhat satisfied with the Administrator's overall performance, representation and leadership.

Analysis showed that 'community engagement' was a key driver of overall satisfaction with Council performance and that work should continue to improve the provision of information to residents and community participation in decision-making.

The 2024 Community Satisfaction Survey results were not available at the time of publishing this report, however will be reported to Council later in 2024.

Continuation of the Community Satisfaction Surveys throughout the Administration period has been an important activity given the guidance it provides when preparing the Operational Plan and Budget and prioritising services for review under the Delivering Better Services Framework.



Importance and Satisfaction

Along with the ability of a service to meet its objectives, be accessible, and meet agreed operating standards, the 'user experience' is a determining factor of best value.

Service areas experiencing a significant or increasing gap between importance and satisfaction, are now prioritised for health checks and service reviews, noting that other factors will also influence the urgency of undertaking a review; for example, risk levels or a service's capacity to carry out a review.

The 2022 survey found a continued downward trend in terms of overall satisfaction with the performance of Council, Council's image and satisfaction with Council contact.

High level results from the 2022 Community Research Survey indicate a need to improve:

- Condition of local roads and footpaths
- Opportunities to participate in Council decision making
- Council provision of information to residents
- Managing growth and development
- Development and compliance and regulation processes

In the meantime, results show higher levels of satisfaction with services such as the library, water, sewer, green and domestic garbage collection.

Since the 2022 survey Council officers have been working to respond to community concerns in regard to areas of lower satisfaction and continue to build on the areas of higher satisfaction, to ensure it delivers services and facilities that align to the needs to the community.

Over the next four years, and in response to community feedback, more than \$405 million has been committed towards improving key assets including roads and footpaths. As well as continuing to focus on open and transparent communication and genuine engagement with the Shire's residents and improving Development Assessment timeframes.

By continuing these surveys, and noting results continue to be influenced by the absence of an elected body, the Administrator has sought transparency and openness in understanding service weaknesses and strengths.

Importance

The following services/facilities received the highest T2 box importance ratings:

Higher importance	T2 Box	Mean
Domestic garbage collection	93%	4.67
Reliability of town water	93%	4.70
Town drinking water quality	91%	4.64
Condition of local roads	91%	4.67
Encouraging recycling	90%	4.62

The following services/facilities received the lowest T2 box importance ratings:

Lower importance	T2 Box	Mean
Provision and maintenance of swimming pools	57%	3.50
Provision and maintenance of sporting facilities	62%	3.79
Provision and maintenance of community halls/facilities	63%	3.84
Revitalisation/beautification of town and village centres as well as the surrounding areas	63%	3.85
Support for arts and culture	65%	3.86

T2B = important/very important
Scale: 1 = not at all important, 5 = very important

Satisfaction

The following services/facilities received the highest T3 box satisfaction ratings:

Higher satisfaction	T3 Box	Mean
Provision and operation of libraries	95%	4.14
Reliability of town water	92%	4.18
Overall sewerage system performance (chokes, overflows, odour)	88%	3.96
Green waste collection	88%	4.02
Domestic garbage collection	88%	4.02

The following services/facilities received the lowest T3 box satisfaction ratings:

Lower satisfaction	T3 Box	Mean
Condition of local roads	15%	1.53
Opportunities to participate in Council decision making	42%	2.31
Managing development and growth	49%	2.44
Enforcement of development and building regulations	54%	2.55
Availability of car parking in the town and village centres	54%	2.55

T3B = somewhat satisfied/satisfied/very satisfied
Scale: 1 = not at all satisfied, 5 = very satisfied



KEY RESULT AREA 06: ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE

The Administrator and General Manager work closely to ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Council however, they have quite distinct roles and responsibilities.

While the Administrator acts in the capacity of a Mayor and elected Councillors (in the absence of the governing body) it is the role of the General Manager to lead Council's operations, ensuring alignment with Council's adopted strategic direction.

The highlights featured below were led by the General Manager and achieved under Administration.

Organisational Road Map

In June 2021 the Administrator appointed Lisa Miscamble as the new General Manager. This followed a robust independent process including the calling of fresh applications for the recruitment of the General Manager.

The General Manager promptly developed 'Our Road Map: Moving Forward as an organisation'.

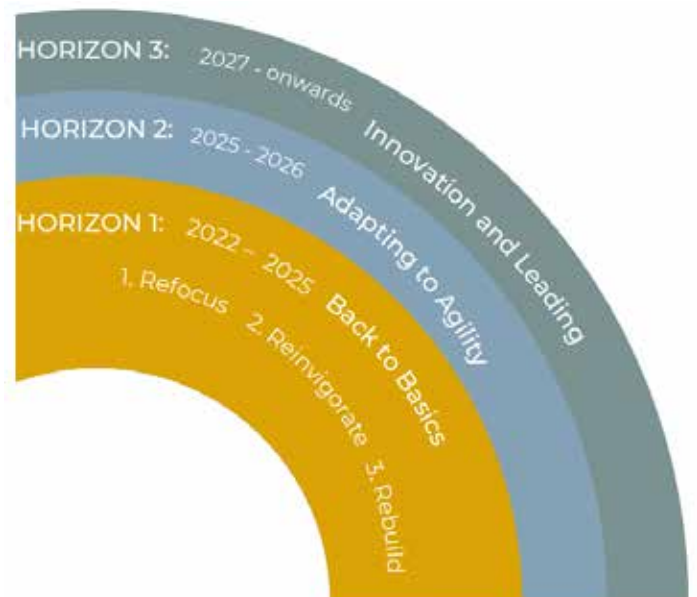
The purpose of the paper was to provide a context for the environment in which the organisation was operating, the current state and to set a road map for the future.

It's goal was to position the organisation to better deliver for its community and establish itself as leading example of local government in NSW.

The Road Map took into consideration the outcomes of recent reviews and strategic documents, existing operational practices and policies, along with information gathered during meetings with residents, government agencies, regional stakeholders, State and Federal members and individual members of Council staff.

The Road Map includes three 'horizons' which provide the organisation with direction in the short, medium and long term.

It also includes principles which guide the way in which the organisation operates, noting that several past practices had to be left behind in order to successfully "refocus, reinvigorate and rebuild".



“Strengthening organisational capacity and resilience”

Horizon 1 ‘Back to Basics’ is due to conclude in 2025 and is progressing well.

Highlights delivered during Administration include:

- Adoption and implementation of the Customer Experience and Standards Charter - this marks a pivotal step in enhancing transparency and accountability, setting clear expectations for service delivery, and fostering a culture of excellence in customer service
- Review of the salary system and implementation of Operational Management Standards and procedures
- Review and adoption of updated Asset Management Plans to coincide with the review of the Resourcing Strategy 2024-2034
- Review of delegations and implementation of a delegations management system
- Adoption of a Community Recreational Facilities Strategy to guide infrastructure planning and resource management
- Adoption of the Environment and Climate Change Strategy
- Adoption of the Service Review Framework (Delivering Better Services)
- Implementation of Fraud and Corruption controls
- Updates to Council's website and a partial rebranding, to refresh and improve Council's communications
- Development of a Risk Framework and Policy
- Improvements to the annual Performance Feedback Development process to reflect the Local Government capability framework
- Business improvements including but not limited to the:
 - Launch of ‘Payable’, a digital direct debit and payment system
 - Roll out of ‘Bookable’, an online facilities booking service
 - Digitisation of legacy records
 - Introduction of a new online reporting module (Pulse) to streamline reporting and better manage data
 - Recruitment and onboarding processes

A New Organisational Structure

The Governance review recommended that “upon the commencement of the new permanent General Manager an immediate review of the structure of Council be undertaken to provide a structure that is clear to staff and community, aligns co-related functions to increase efficiency and collaboration, and enables strategic planning and innovation to occur.”

The initial restructure phase was completed in October 2021 and a new leadership team established.

The next phase was completed in 2022 with a restructure of the Service and Project Delivery directorate. The third phase included changes to the Corporate Strategy and Resourcing directorate (October 2022) Communities and Place directorate (March 2023) and General Manager’s Unit (April 2024).

The General Manager continues to refine the structure to enable a more adaptive workforce with further work to be undertaken in consultation with the incoming Council post September 2024.

Organisational Values

Another outcome of the Road Map initiative was the development of a Organisational Values.

The dysfunction of the former Council, its suspension and subsequent fall out from the Public Inquiry, and the resulting community perceptions, have impacted staff members many of whom reside in the Shire.

To support the health, safety, and wellbeing of the staff, as well as promote a culture of service excellence, the organisation undertook an activity to reassess and redefine its core values.

The work also included creation of an organisational Vision - We strive to make a positive impact in our community!

The Values were developed by the staff and define what behaviours are acceptable, expected and celebrated.

They also help to guide decision-making, support a more positive and impactful culture and help staff as they navigate conflict.

Our Values Statement

R E S P E C T

Resilience

Empathy

Sustainability

Pride

Efficiency

Courage

Teamwork

A Resilient and Sustainable Workforce

Approximately 70% of Council's workforce reside in the local government area.

In recent years this workforce, along with the broader community, has felt the impacts of severe weather events including bushfires.

It has been disrupted not only by dysfunction, suspension and the fall out of the Public Inquiry but the global pandemic which impacted not only the way in which some services are delivered but also the way in which people work.

The organisation is also feeling the impacts of state wide skills shortages in key roles.

A multifaceted approach has commenced to address these shortages and develop the organisation as a 'workplace of choice'. This requires an ongoing focus on workplace culture, learning and development, work-life balance and a competitive salary system.

Council's Workforce Management Strategy was updated in 2023 to address key challenges and take advantage of opportunities to build capacity and resilience.

Challenges addressed by the Strategy include:

- Attracting and retaining staff in a competitive local government market
- Sector-wide skills shortages including for building surveyors, town planners, engineers, project managers and labourers
- An ageing workforce
- Staff safety, health and wellbeing

The revised Workforce Management Strategy aligns to the Organisational Road Map with a view to "refocus and reinvigorate" the workforce, whilst also striving to be an innovative, resilient and effective organisation that consistently demonstrates strong leadership.

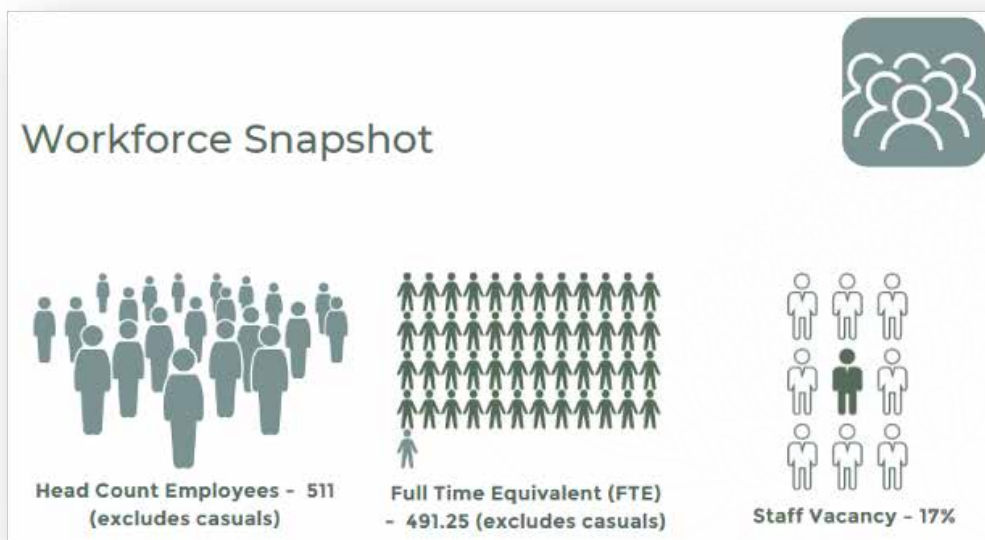
It's implementation has been an important contributor to the organisation's change management process.

Implementation continues with recent highlights including:

- Design and roll out of a leadership development program
- Completion of an internal psychological health and safety audit
- Launch of a new e-recruitment system
- Launch of the Health and Wellbeing Calendar with a focus on nutrition, and health awareness
- Conduct of a Workforce Health Expo
- Supporting career progression through tertiary funding assistance and acting in higher positions
- Working with TAFE to enable trade qualified employees to share their skills with other employees
- Creation of additional cadet, apprenticeship and trainee roles

An Action Plan has been developed, with measurable workforce targets in place.

The Workforce Management Strategy will be re-evaluated in 2025.



Digital Efficiencies and Improvements

The community is increasingly looking to Council for a more modernised approach to delivering customer services: transactions that are fast, convenient, secure, and personalised.

There has been underinvestment in systems and processes over the past decade resulting in an antiquated technological environment that lacks integration and requires new hardware.

Council faces several challenges in the absence of digital transformation. These challenges include:

- Outdated legacy systems that are difficult and costly to upgrade and lack flexibility or scalability
- Ineffective data management with large amounts of data stored in disparate systems, making it difficult to manage and access information efficiently and securely
- Handling of sensitive data that must be kept secure and the risk of cyber-attacks and data breaches if security is not adequately addressed
- Engaging the community in line with their customer needs and expectations
- Ensuring compliance with a range of laws, regulations, and policies related to data privacy, security, and accessibility

To address these challenges, Council's Digital Strategy was comprehensively reviewed in 2022.

The following are examples of opportunities that have now been costed and embedded in the Long Term Financial Plan to ensure Council can continue its business transformation:

- Upgrade of Council's core technology system, Technology One, to provide a smoother, integrated platform for the community to conduct transactions and engage with Council staff
- Investment in Council's Cyber Security infrastructure and reporting systems to ensure information is secure
- Investment in Asset Management systems to ensure financial information aligns to asset condition data
- Digitisation of a number of paper-based processes to modernise and streamline business processes

Council has also established performance indicators to track progress made towards digital transformation, which look beyond the number of digital transformation activities completed to focus more on outcomes across seven goal areas. These are being monitored as part Council's Digital Strategy.

Goal	Performance Indicator
1. Increase productivity	Time saved by employees as a result of digital transformation
2. Improve customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction levels before and after the transformation
3. Increase efficiency	Percentage of tasks that are now automated or streamlined as a result of the digital transformation
4. Improve data quality	Data quality before and after the transformation
5. Reduce costs	Cost savings associated with the transformation
6. Increase employee engagement	Employee satisfaction and engagement levels before and after the transformation
7. Protect the organisation from cyber threats	Number of threats identified and successfully resolved prior to and after the transformation





KEY RESULT AREA 07: PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

Righting the Wrongs

Strategic thought and direction had been replaced, in the view of the Administrator, by populist decision-making and rebuttal of State planning directives by former Council/s. As a result Earnest Consulting was engaged by the then Interim Administrator to carry out a review of the planning function of Council.

It was considered that an independent review would provide an unclouded perspective on the current state of planning and development processes and propose a way forward.

The Review included a series of interviews with both members of staff (19) and the public (83).

Several themes, or areas requiring improvement, emerged in relation to Council's existing planning functions including:

- Customer Service
- Planning
- Leadership
- Compliance
- Transparency
- Consistency
- Structure



As a result of the Review, work is progressing to establish a more efficient, consistent and transparent process that provides a better experience for customers while protecting the best interests of the Shire.

A key finding of the Review was the need to improve overall development assessment processes noting that the planning function of local government is complex with different statutory obligations and varying stakeholder needs.

In 2021 the Administrator established the Wingecarribee Local Planning Panel to deal with development applications (DAs) and make recommendations on planning proposals. The independent review acknowledged that this was the “appropriate action” to protect the role of Councillors in future development assessment processes.

The Administrator also initiated updates to Council and the community on the performance of development assessments. The most recent report to Council (May 2024) outlined the ongoing challenges of addressing a significant backlog of work dating back to 2021 while dealing with more recent applications.

While the most recent available data shows a lapse in determination times following a period of improvement, it should be noted that output levels must be balanced with outcomes.

While application assessment was considered satisfactory by some in 2019/20 and 2020/21, many of the applications were not being assessed by people trained in planning assessment and planning legislation.

The thoroughness of the assessment was generally lower and led to subsequent unjustified street character loss, stormwater management issues, a contaminated land incident, and multiple consent validity issues, including third-party Land and Environment Court appeals.

An ongoing challenge is the recruitment of suitably qualified staff to assess applications, given sector wide skills shortages for planners.

While more needs to be done, essential foundational work is progressing to provide an improved customer experience and better outcomes for the community.

“Planning for the social, economic and environmental betterment of the Shire”

Application Tracker

A priority during Administration has been the improvement and streamlining of online DA services (e-services).

A key action stemming from the Independent Review was the roll out of an Application Tracker; introduced in end of March 2024 to allow the community with improved access to information pertaining to individual DAs.

People can now search for DAs using the NSW Planning Portal Application Number (PAN), application type, date created, or applications on exhibition, with options to view them in List, Map, or Card view.

It provides a ‘single source of truth’ for DAs in train and allows people to track specific DAs for updates, submit public comments online, and attach supporting documents or images.

Another initiative to improve transparency in the application process that has been recently added is the reporting to the Local Planning Panel of any application over 180 days with short commentary. A recommendation is to be made to the August 2024 Council meeting regarding Land and Environment Court Appeals.

As at the end of July 2024, since its launch Council's Application Tracker has received

- 39 submissions on DA's
- Over 13,500 clicks to the Development webpage resulting in over 5,000 clicks on the Application Tracker
- 290 follows of applications.

Progressing the Community's Vision

In late 2022 the Administrator commissioned a review of the Wingecarribee Community Strategic Plan.

While a full review is due in 2025 in discussion with the incoming Council, this interim project was undertaken to ensure the existing strategy was reflective of new and emerging issues.

The Community Strategic Plan (CSP) is the highest level plan a Council can develop on behalf of its community and includes the community's long term vision for the Shire to be “a healthy, respectful, productive community, learning and living in harmony, proud of our heritage and nurturing our environment.”

The review, undertaken by Kathryn Ridley Consulting, included discussion groups, analysis of 43 key informing documents including regional and local strategies and plans and the results of recent community engagement.

Wingecarribee 2041, was endorsed in April 2023 and addresses identified gaps in the previous CSP including:

- An ageing population
- Access to housing
- Building community resilience
- Natural disasters and weather events
- Digital innovation
- Supporting and retaining young people in the Shire
- Opportunities due to the Shire's strategic location
- Rural and slow tourism
- Supporting people with a disability to access jobs
- Growth of creative industries throughout the Shire

The update will help guide the incoming Council as it embarks on another review in 2025.

Community Strategic Plan Wingecarribee 2041



Achieving Better Outcomes

A priority for the Administrator has been to ensure continuation of key policy and planning to support implementation of the Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) which outlines the community's aspiration's for the Shire's environmental, agricultural, economic, housing, infrastructure and character qualities.

The LSPS translates the higher level vision of the CSP into practical land-use outcomes and actions.

During Administration several significant projects have progressed, including the development and adoption of the:

- Robertson Village Place Plan
- Wingecarribee Medium Density Study
- Bowral Town Centre Master Plan
- Low-Density Residential Development Controls
- Community Heritage Study

The adoption of the Heritage Study is the culmination of a significant body of work undertaken by community volunteers and Council staff dating back to 2012 when Council deferred for further consultation over 200 potential heritage items recommended by the Wingecarribee Heritage Survey 2009.

Work progressed on the draft Master Plan and Governance Strategy for the Southern Highlands Innovation Park which was placed on public exhibition in July 2024. The outcomes of the public exhibition will be reported to the new Council.

In parallel to these projects, Council continued implementation of the Wingecarribee Local Housing Strategy, to deliver housing supply and diversity in conjunction with essential infrastructure.

These new strategies and plans will assist the incoming Council to review its existing land-use planning framework and contributions plans as well as the resourcing strategies required to fund necessary infrastructure.

In 2023 the Administrator requested a formal report to Council on the program of work being undertaken to achieve strategic outcomes.

The program, which was reported to Council in August 2023, seeks to address several critical issues for the Southern Highlands and broader region including:

- Unlocking regionally significant employment lands
- Supporting economic development
- Increasing housing supply and diversity to meet the needs of the community
- Ensuring that growing and changing communities are supported by essential infrastructure, delivered in a staged and strategic manner

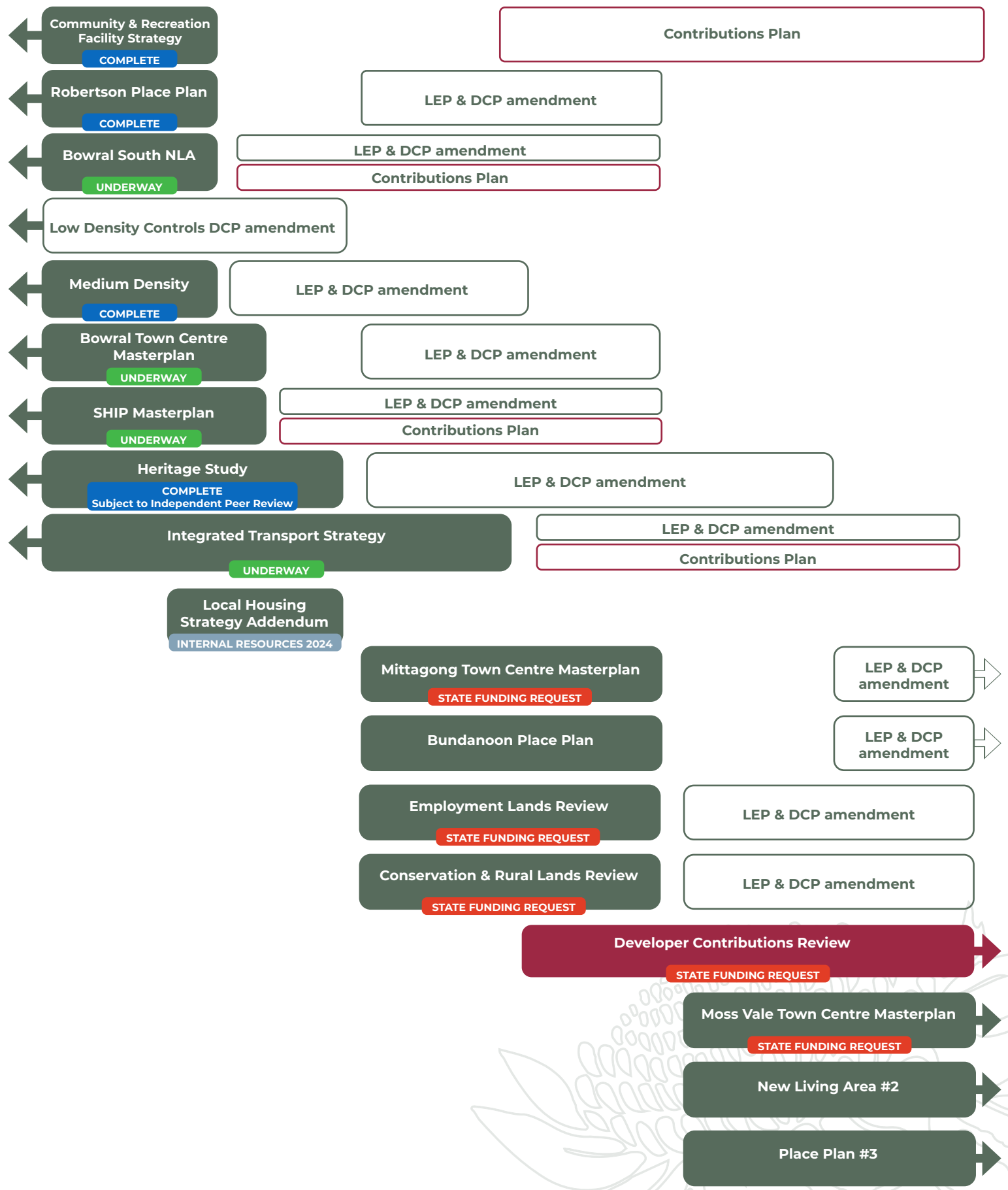
Importantly, the program supports the vision outlined in the Wingecarribee Local Strategic Planning Statement and, in addition to ongoing community consultation, will provide the incoming Council with a strong evidence base for the pending review of the Wingecarribee Local Environmental Plan and Council's Development Control Plans.

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

2023/24

2024/25

2025/26



The following provides a snap shot of key work undertaken during Administration to progress the LSPS and provide the incoming Council with a clear strategic framework for land-use planning.

Economic Development

Important steps have been taken to boost economic development across the district.

An example is the development and public exhibition of a Master Plan and Governance Strategy for the Southern Highlands Innovation Park (SHIP).

The SHIP is a regionally significant employment precinct comprising some 1,023 hectares of industrial zoned land between Moss Vale and New Berrima.

It provides a unique opportunity to attract sustainable and innovative industries and become a major employer and economic driver for the Shire and broader region.

The SHIP was initially identified as an employment precinct under the 1989 Wingecarribee LEP, however, due to a number of factors, including the lack of a clear vision for the Precinct, the land remained largely undeveloped.

Under Administration, the SHIP Master Plan was prioritised with the first phase of the planning process well advanced. In addition, \$270,000 in grant funding was secured to complete phase two under the NSW Government's Business Case and Strategy Development Fund.

Housing Supply

The Local Housing Strategy was adopted in June 2020 setting a target of 50% infill and 50% new living areas.

It sets the long-term planning framework to meet the housing needs of the community.

The Local Housing Strategy planned for approximately 6,500 new dwellings through a mix of infill and greenfield development over the next 20 years.

There have been a number of significant shifts in the local environment (e.g. population forecasts, regional planning targets) since its adoption, which may result in some changes to the original Strategy, however, it continues to provide the Council and the community with a holistic and comprehensive approach to addressing housing supply.

Review of Medium and Low Density Development Controls (DCPs)

In 2022, Council undertook major reviews of its Medium and Low Density Controls to promote an increase in housing diversity and ensure that medium and low density development is in keeping with the character of the Southern Highlands.

Council's current DCPs are cumbersome and unclear, even for a professional. There are 17 DCP's and together total 3,800 pages.

As part of the review of the Wingecarribee DCPs, Council is seeking to simplify the planning process for low density residential housing, with a streamlined application and assessment process for residential development.

This work will significantly improve the application process for individuals lodging development applications for residential development, providing a clearer planning framework and facilitation of fast-tracked approval processes through a dedicated Fast Track team.

The Medium Density Study and Low Density Development Controls have now been adopted.



Place Based Approach to infrastructure Planning

Integrated Transport

A significant gap in strategy has been the absence of an integrated approach to transport planning. In mid-2023 Council engaged the Institute for Sensible Transport to undertake the Wingecarribee Integrated Transport Strategy (WITS).

The Strategy is intended to provide a long term blueprint to guide transport policy and investment decisions, providing a consistent approach to achieving change that aligns with wider strategic objectives. It also acts as an advocacy platform to attract investment in the transport network.

The draft Strategy was placed on public exhibition in May 2024. The Strategy is now being refined to align with the proposed Regional Transport Strategy and will be referred to the incoming Council for determination.

Town Centre Master Plans – Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale

Council is developing Master Plans for its three main centres of Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale to provide a clear vision and strategic direction, and to act as a catalyst for new development and the revitalisation of town centres.

Bowral, Mittagong and Moss Vale each have a unique character and identity, but collectively form a strategic cluster that is the economic, cultural and social heart of the Shire.

The three towns also play an important economic function, as well as being one of the closest 'lifestyle' centres to the new Western Sydney Aerotropolis.

Like other Master Plans completed or in train, they will directly inform the reviews of Council's LEP and DCPs, including making recommendations on building heights, and urban design development controls

Development of the Master Plan for the Bowral Town Centre was undertaken in 2024 and informed by extensive consultation with residents and business owners. The Master Plan was adopted in July 2024.

Bowral South New Living Area – Master Plan and Servicing Strategy

The Bowral South New Living Area is one of six new living areas identified through the Local Housing Strategy and is anticipated to accommodate over 2,000 new dwellings on the south-east of the Bowral township.

The Local Housing Strategy commits Council to undertake several key planning processes prior to the land being rezoned, to ensure that new development areas are well planned and designed and supported by essential infrastructure delivered in a staged and strategic manner.

Under the Strategy Council must develop an Infrastructure Plan and Servicing Strategy as well as a Master Plan, to identify the infrastructure requirements to support the New Living Areas and to ensure that as communities grow, so too will the capacity of our infrastructure networks.

The Servicing Strategy will ensure that infrastructure is delivered in a well-planned and efficient way.

During Administration, Council secured \$250,000 in grant funding under the Regional Housing Strategic Planning Fund to complete the Master Plan and Servicing Strategy, which will expedite the release of the New Living Area and ensure that the new community is well planned and supported.

The Master Plan is one of the first plans of its type to be initiated by Wingecarribee Shire Council.

The draft Bowral South New Living Area and Servicing Strategy was endorsed for Public Exhibition in July 2024.

Village Place Plans

As part of the transition to a place-based planning system, Council developed an award winning community-led Place Plan for Robertson.

The Plan was developed in 2023/24 as a holistic place-based plan that will directly inform a review of the local planning framework, as well as determine priorities for infrastructure upgrades for Robertson Village.

The Robertson Village Place Plan was adopted in May 2024, following a period of public exhibition.

In order to continue the successful delivery of future Place Plans for the Shire’s satellite villages, a Village Place Plan Program 2024-2026 is now in place to guide the development of plans that proactively address local housing, economic, environmental, social and cultural needs.



Infrastructure Funding

Funding the delivery of infrastructure forms a key part of the strategic planning process.

It is important to note that there is no one single means of funding infrastructure, and Council needs to consider a range of funding mechanisms to deliver the infrastructure required to support communities.

The key infrastructure studies outlined in this End of Term Report will form the basis of a major review of Council's contributions plans and ensure that new development is supported by new and augmented infrastructure.

Landholders in New Living Areas, developers, builders, and new residents should not benefit at the expense of existing residents and the lost opportunities of the past should not be repeated. Developers must pay for new infrastructure and upgrades to ensure Shire-wide benefits. This is ensured by applying a strategic approach to New Living Areas and catalyst development sites, led by masterplans and up-to-date Contributions Plans to pay for infrastructure across the Shire.

By way of example, in October 2023 Council adopted the Community and Recreation Facilities Strategy (CRFS) which provides an important evidence base to inform a review of Council's Developer Contributions Plans.

The CRFS is a 20 year strategic document developed to guide and inform the planning, funding and delivery of formal community and recreation facilities across the Shire.

It is not intended to be a definitive plan for implementation: it recognises the need for more detailed analysis and engagement with the community on specific elements, closer to the time of delivery.

Strategies such as the Community Strategic Plan, Community and Recreational Facilities Strategy, the Local Housing Strategy and Integrated Transport Strategy will provide the incoming Council with important information that will inform decisions about planning and assist with ongoing advocacy for the funding of local infrastructure and services.

The Town Centre Master Plans and Village Place Plans will be used to informed the allocation of funds in the Long Term Financial Plan and the 10 year Capital Works Program.





KEY RESULT AREA 08: LESSONS LEARNED

Acknowledging past mistakes is essential for improvement. A process of reflection and adaptation helps build resilience and ensures that governments can navigate future challenges more effectively.

As a result, 12 independent reviews to better understand 'what went wrong' under the previous Council were commissioned in order to take appropriate action.

An overview of the progress implementing recommendations from each review is provided on Page 18.

The following focuses on the Independent Review into the 2019/20 bushfires as well as the key issues identified during the Public Inquiry.

Council's Bushfire Response

Wingecarribee Shire was significantly impacted by two major bushfires in 2019 and 2020.

The first fire known as the Green Wattle Creek Fire occurred on the 19 December 2019. It impacted the localities of Buxton and Balmoral resulting in loss of property and significant disruptions in the way of road closures.

The second major bushfire occurred on 4 January 2020 when extensive ember attacks from the Currowan Fire to the south of the Shire crossed the Shoalhaven River into the Morton National Park. This fire also impacted the Village of Wingello, the eastern and southern parts of Bundanoon and Penrose, the outskirts of Exeter and the locality of Meryla.

In May 2021 the Administrator commissioned an Independent Review into Council's response to the 2019/20 Black Summer Bushfires.

The Review considered Council's actions across the four phases of emergency management: prevention, preparation, response and recovery.

The Review, conducted by Dave Owens, was presented to Council in July 2021 and exposed several key failings.

The final report acknowledged that Local Government is not the combat agency responsible for all actions in responding to and recovering from natural disasters however it remains an important "port of call for a community and must demonstrate clear leadership and decision making in times of crisis".

It concluded that "this leadership was non-existent in the response and recovery to the bush fires".

The Review identified other issues including:

- A lack of understanding by Councillors and the Executive about emergency management and the role of Council in a crisis
- Gaps in the existing Wingecarribee Shire Local Emergency Management Plan
- Gaps in operational policies and procedures
- The absence of contingency plans to replace the key staff absent during the bushfires
- The suitability and accessibility of the Emergency Operations Centre and evacuation facilities
- The absence of a Local Recovery Plan which hampered the recovery effort
- The creation of a Mayoral Relief Fund without taxation office (ATO) approval or a clear decision-making framework in place



“Implementing lessons from the Public Inquiry and Independent Reviews”

The Administrator has also continued to act as the Chair of the Bush Fire Management Committee on an alternating schedule with the Mayor of Wollondilly.

Key actions implemented include:

- Updating the Wollondilly / Wingecarribee Bush Fire Risk Management Plan (BFRMP) updated in March 2023 (led by NSW Rural Fire Service)
- Preparing the Wingecarribee Local Recovery Plan which takes a place-based approach and enables working relationships with neighbouring local government areas, Resilience NSW and other stakeholders
- Early provision of welfare services/mental health support services included in the Local Recovery Plan
- Updating to the Wingecarribee Shire Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) by the Wingecarribee Shire Council Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC)
- Developing and/or reviewing key operational policies and procedures to be enacted on extreme or catastrophic fire rating days
- ‘An Introduction to Emergency Management’ course established for Council staff for 2023/24
- Developing of a Community Recovery Toolkit designed to build on the experience of both the Wingecarribee and Wollondilly communities, which after the Green Wattle Creek bushfire successfully established and operated a community recovery hub to support people directly and indirectly impacted

A notable achievement was the opening in May 2024 of the new Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in Moss Vale. A key recommendation from the Independent Review; the site provides a dedicated space to facilitate a coordinated response to emergencies across participating agencies.

The full Review, along with all Independent Reviews commissioned during Administration, are available on Council's website.



Wingecarribee Shire Council Public Inquiry

The Public Inquiry, along with the Independent Reviews, identified areas requiring immediate attention, as well as those to be actioned prior to and following the next local government election.

While work has been completed during Administration to address many of these, it will be the responsibility of the new Council to ensure lessons are not forgotten.

In the meantime, the Administrator has worked closely with the General Manager to address issues raised by the Commissioner and develop an induction program for the incoming Council that supports Councillors in having the necessary skills and knowledge to undertake their roles effectively.

The table below provides a snapshot of work undertaken to date to address issues raised during the Public Inquiry.

It is important to note that many of these issues cannot be addressed by the Administrator and are dependent on the newly elected governing body acknowledging the mistakes of the past to ensure they are not repeated.

Issue	Actions completed or pending
Limited understanding of roles and responsibilities and what they mean in a practical sense	Induction program to include roles and responsibilities. The program is in development, to be ready for roll out following the local government elections in September.
Misconduct and acts of disorder in Council meetings	Code of Meeting Practice reviewed as a matter of priority and included in induction program.
Failure to carry out strategic planning obligations due to dysfunction	Review of the Community Strategic Plan completed in 2023 to ensure alignment with strategic issues, both current and emerging. Review and development of other key planning documents including the Community and Recreation Facilities Strategy. Development of a Strategic Outcomes Program of Works covering significant Plans of Management, Master Plans and Servicing Strategies to support achievement of social, economic, environmental and local character (heritage) goals
Safe workplace failures in regard to bullying and harassment	Councillor WHS obligations and fostering a safe workplace have been incorporated into Councillor Induction Program and will be a focus of on-going professional development.
Lack of adherence to meeting procedure (Code of Meeting Practice)	Code of Meeting Practice updated and to be included in the Councillor induction program.
Inappropriate behaviour to staff and fellow Councillors	Staff and Councillor interaction Policy updated and to be included in the induction program.
Lack of adherence to Conflict of Interest provisions	Conflict of Interest included in the induction program, along with updated policies and procedures
Councillors lack of clarity between strategic and operational roles	Roles and responsibilities included in the induction program.
Managers did not know how to respond to intrusions into operational matters	Code of Conduct and Interaction with Councillor training has been scheduled for the management team prior to the commencement of the new Council.
Councillor attempts to influence staff recommendations and determinations particularly in planning functions	To be noted by the incoming Councillors. Separation of roles and responsibilities as well as staff/Councillor interactions included in induction program.
Poor behaviour in Councillor briefings	Code of Meeting Practice updated and to be included in the Councillor induction program.
Councillors being 'hands on' when raising matters on behalf of constituents	Code of Conduct updated and included in induction program. To be noted by the incoming Councillors.

Issue	Actions completed or pending
Criticisms of Council and administration in public arena	Media training and Code of Conduct Training has been incorporated into the Councillor Induction Program.
Lack of alignment between strategic documents	Review of key strategic documents and development of a draft framework of Council developed strategies and plans. The framework brings all Council strategies and plans under the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework and introduces consistent standards for future strategy development.
Resourcing Strategy – not updated at time of Finch Review	Resourcing Strategy comprehensively reviewed and adopted in 2023 and updated in 2024 inclusive of a Long Term Financial Plan, Asset Management Strategy, Workforce Management Strategy and Digital Strategy.
Lack of Local Recovery Plan at time of bushfires	Independent Review into the bushfire response commissioned by the Administrator. Key recommendations stemming from the review now implemented including the development of a Local Recovery Plan (2023)
Records Management - failures in document management and control leading to inability to respond in a timely manner and missing information.	Systems integration and digital transformation work continues to be progressed. Upgrades completed to the main technology system, Technology One.
Community Consultation	Community Engagement Strategy (CES) reviewed, and a paper prepared by Kathryn Ridley Consulting outlining key improvement areas and recommendations. The new CES was adopted in December 2023 as includes a principle-based approach to engagement Community Engagement toolkit for staff updated in 2024.
Use of media to undermine confidence in the community Inaccurate press releases indicate lack of knowledge and intention to mislead the community	Media training and Code of Conduct Training has been incorporated into the Councillor Induction Program.
Economic Development and Business Relations	KPMG facilitated economic round table with businesses to identify issues including opportunities and challenges for the regional and local economy.
Planning powers used inappropriately	Role of Councillors in planning processes included in induction program. Development Application services “health check” completed along with an independent review of existing processes.
Reputational risks were created by the behaviour of Councillors and the active undermining of decisions and the administration	To be noted by the incoming Councillors.
Loss of trust in Council by the community evidenced by community surveys	Transparent decision-making demonstrated through open Council meetings and briefings and scheduled Village Visits and Listening Tours. Community Survey undertaken in 2022 and again in 2024 to monitor results.
Staff attraction and retention	Workforce Management Strategy reviewed in 2023 with a focus on attracting and retaining staff. Action Plan developed and currently being implemented.
Staff Leadership failings	A comprehensive staff leadership training program delivered in 2023/2024. A newly established Executive structure and General Manager.
Councillor Leadership failings	To be noted by incoming Councillors. While new decision making frameworks and policies are now in place, it will be the responsibility of the newly elected body to ensure effective leadership in the best interest of the community it serves.
Customer Service concerns	A Customer Service Charter has been developed and is now being implemented. The charter sets standards for customer service to improve the customer experience.

Awards

2023 NSW Planning Institute of Australia, NSW Awards for Planning Excellence, Stakeholder Engagement Award – Strategic Outcomes; Roberston Village Place Plan.

2023 National Agsafe Awards, Drum Muster Collection Facility of the Year 2023 – Resource Recovery Centre.

2023 Sustainability Advantage Recognition, recognised as an official Bronze Member of the NSW Sustainability Advantage Program acknowledging the efforts of local government in promoting sustainability.

Winner

2023 LGNSW Awards for Excellence in Planning and Development for the Robertson Place Plan.

Winner

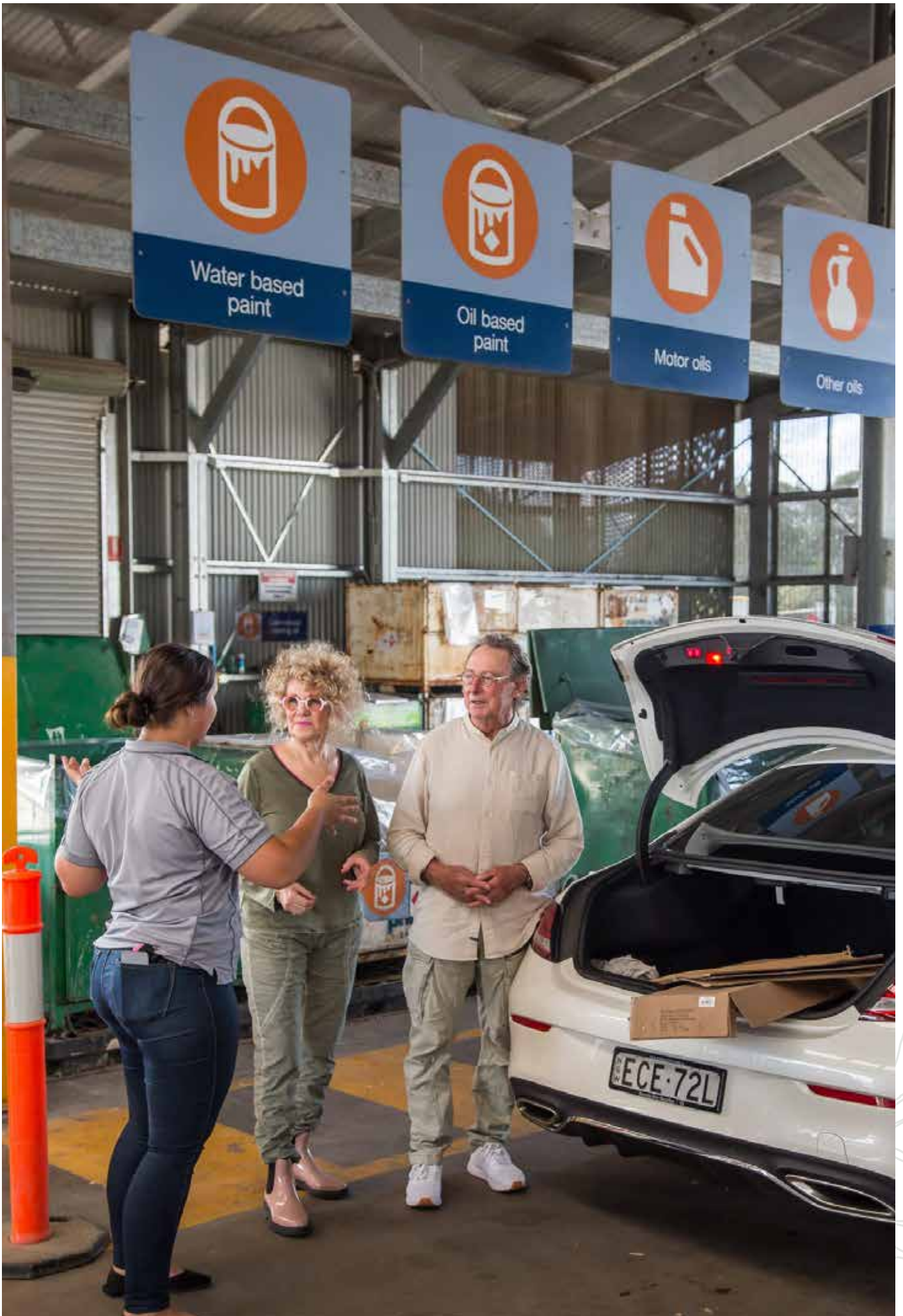
2023 RH Dougherty Events and Communications Awards for Excellence in Communications – Seniors Festival.

Finalist

2023 DH Dougherty Events and Communications Awards for Excellence in Communications – Sustainable Us.

Finalist

2024 LGNSW Awards for Excellence in Customer Experience Optimisation the implementation of the Digital Direct Payment System to assist Rate Payers to manage their rates and water payments.



Conclusion

This Administrator's End of Term Report serves to set the scene for the incoming Council, as it works to re-establish local democracy and create its own way forward.

There is no simple 'fix' to repairing a breakdown in public trust, and rebuilding confidence in local government can take time.

It has been the Administrator's role to commence this process by restoring the integrity and effectiveness of the Council through transparent communication, decisive action, and commitment to accountability and good governance.

Administrators are typically appointed to address severe dysfunction or governance failures, and their role is to bring expertise and objectivity. They are tasked with diagnosing problems, implementing best practice, and ensuring compliance with legal and ethical standards.

The Administrator has sometimes made difficult but necessary decisions to rectify issues and set the Council on a new path. The Administration period has therefore served as a crucial reset, working to rebuild trust with the community and prepare for a return to elected leadership.

It is important to note that the Public Inquiry found dysfunction within the Governing Body that resulted in "negative impact on the organisation" and impaired the Council's ability to fully perform its functions.

The end of Administration marks a significant moment in the history of Wingecarribee Shire Council.

The local government elections on 14 September 2024 will restore democratic processes and local representation, with elected officials can once again leading and making decisions on behalf of their constituents.

While this is a positive step forward, a period of Administration was nonetheless essential for addressing the critical issues that necessitated intervention in the first place.

The incoming Council's role is to keep the momentum, ensuring that future plans are responsible, effective and representative of the community's aspirations and needs.

As outlined in this Report, the Administrator's term of office has resulted in steady progress towards strategic objectives and has been highlighted by many accomplishments.

The Report acknowledges that while more work needs to be done, a solid foundation is now in place to assist the incoming Council to advance with confidence and clarity.



This Administrator's End of Term Report (the Report) is an overview of the Administration period and provides residents and the incoming Council with information about progress to date against key initiatives.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data; however, Council makes no representation or warranties that the information is without error.





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02 4868 0888