

2025-12-15 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ATTACHMENTS

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**NORTHERN
MIDLANDS
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

MONDAY, 9 DECEMBER 2024



NORTHERN
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COUNCIL

2024-12-09 Annual General Meeting - Minutes

MINUTES of the Annual General Meeting of the Northern Midlands Council held on 9 December 2024 at 5.00pm in person at the Council Chambers, 13 Smith Street, Longford

1 ATTENDANCE

PRESENT

Mayor Mary Knowles OAM, Deputy Mayor Janet Lambert, Cr Dick Adams OAM, Cr Alison Andrews AM, Cr Richard Archer, Cr Matthew Brooks, Cr Paul Terrett

In Attendance

Mr Des Jennings - General Manager, Miss Maree Bricknell - Corporate Services Manager, Mr Leigh McCullagh - Works Manager, Mr Paul Godier - Senior Planner, Ms Tatiana Paniagua - Executive Officer, Ms Kristy Nutting - Executive Officer, Mr Ben Badcock - IT Officer, Mrs Gail Eachers - Executive Assistant, Mrs Lee Viney - Executive Assistant

Registered Electors In Attendance

Ms Sue Field, Mr Glenn Leighton, Ms Barbara Baker, Ms Maria Lawson, Ms Stephanie Kensitt

APOLOGIES

Cr Richard Goss, Cr Andrew McCullagh



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3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge and pay our respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community as the traditional and original owners, and continuing custodians of this land on which we gather today and acknowledge Elders – past, present and emerging.

4 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

A welcome and opening address by Mayor Knowles.

Mayor Knowles read from the following statement:

In 2023/2024 the Council progressed projects of varying sizes across the municipal area including the recent completion of The Longford Memorial Hall. This has been extended and refurbished to provide additional space and improved facilities for the community and is already proving to be a popular venue for events with the recent Illuminate program which saw participation and collaboration between all the schools across the Northern Midlands. Additionally, the Longford Village Green and BBQ area have been upgraded, offering enhanced amenities for outdoor gatherings and events. These include a successful celebration of cultural diversity with the Community Pacific Festival in April showcasing our Pacific Island and Timor Leste seasonal workers in a fun afternoon, and the inaugural Scots Day Out event which saw pipe bands marching throughout the village green in February 2024.

In line with Council's strategy to make our amenities more accessible to people of all abilities, the entrances to Cressy Hall and the Longford Library have been renovated for convenient access for all community members, including those with mobility challenges.

The public toilets at Pioneer Park in Evandale have been upgraded to meet modern standards. These improvements include accessible toilets and more robust facilities to cater to the needs of the many park visitors.

The Avoca Museum & Information Centre has been renovated to improve functionality and appeal for the volunteers and visitors. The renovations offer a better experience for visitors and the volunteers who promote local heritage to ensure that this remains a prime tourist attraction in the Heritage Highway region.

In other infrastructure programs, the Northern Midlands Council has successfully executed its annual Footpath Program for 2023-24, ensuring safer pedestrian pathways throughout the municipality. The kerb and verge in Falmouth Street, Avoca, from Churchill to Gray Street have been replaced and sealed. In Perth a new traffic calming measure has been implemented on Seccombe Street with the installation of speed humps and signage to reduce vehicle speeds, ensuring a safer environment for pedestrians and residents.

Since the completion of the Perth bypass and the transfer of roads to council's jurisdiction a comprehensive stormwater upgrade has been completed on Perth Main Street. This project involved the installation of new drainage systems to mitigate flooding risks and improve water management during heavy rainfall events, thereby enhancing the overall resilience of the town's infrastructure.

Council is committed to continuing its work in upgrading roads and municipal development, with road upgrades in a section of Ashby Road in Ross which has been reconstructed to improve road safety and durability. The new road surface ensures a smoother and safer drive for motorists and the construction of Bishopsbourne Road between railway crossings at Toiberry has been completed.

With the Bridge replacements at Liffey Road, Jones Road, and Blackwood Creek Road now complete, these new bridges have been designed to enhance safety and reliability for motorists, ensuring better connectivity and access for the surrounding areas.

The Northern Midlands Council also recognises the significant contributions that local sporting clubs make to our community and the positive impact they have on our residents' well-being and social cohesion. Local sporting clubs are essential to the fabric of our municipality. They provide our residents with the opportunities for physical activity, foster community spirit and offer a platform for social interaction and inclusion. The Perth practice cricket nets have been upgraded to meet current standards, providing a high-quality training facility for local cricket teams. This upgrade includes the installation of new netting and improved surface conditions to ensure a safe and effective training environment.



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An advanced irrigation system has been installed at the Longford Rec Ground Oval. This system ensures optimal watering of the oval, maintaining the turf in prime condition for sporting events and community use.

The hot water system in the Campbell Town Recreation changing rooms has been improved. This upgrade ensures a more reliable supply of hot water, enhancing the comfort and convenience for sports teams and visitors using the facilities.

The kitchen at the Ross Recreation Grounds Clubrooms has been upgraded with new appliances and an improved layout enhancing the functionality and usability of the kitchen, supporting community events and sports activities.

The playground at the Train Park in Perth has undergone significant upgrades. New play equipment has been installed, and existing structures have been refurbished to provide a safe, fun, and inclusive space for children and families.

Moving beyond the infrastructure programs, Community feedback is now incorporated into the draft strategies for Council's consideration. Our consultations during the year included the proposed Campbell Town Tourist Park and the draft Weed Management Strategy.

Council officers have developed a series of strategies to further support the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2027 to create a sense of purpose and define the direction in which the Council may travel and establishes realistic strategic outcomes that are in line with Council's vision and mission. The first five local community strategies are:

- Arts and Culture Strategy 2024
- Communications & Engagement Strategy 2024
- Economic Development Strategy 2024
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024
- Youth Strategy 2024

This year has also been a remarkable one for the Council, marked by numerous successful events and strong community engagement. A highlight has been our welcoming of new Australian citizens through our Citizenship Ceremonies, fostering inclusivity and a sense of belonging within the community.

Key events included the official opening of the Longford Road Safety Park, an important initiative promoting road safety awareness. We also hosted the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Community Event, celebrating our diverse workforce and strengthening ties with international communities with a visit from the Hon Consul for Timor Leste Dr Nitin Vermer and welcoming the Vanuatu High Commissioner at Cressy Town Hall. Additionally, the Scott Day Oot Pipe Band event brought more cultural vibrancy and entertainment to our region, while the Cressy DHS Inspiring Futures Charter signing demonstrated our commitment to supporting and inspiring local youth. Our annual Australia Day Celebrations were once again a standout, bringing the community together to recognise our outstanding citizens and volunteers as well as our shared values and national pride.

These events have not only enriched our community but have also strengthened our Council's relationship with residents and stakeholders, highlighting our ongoing commitment to engagement, celebration, and collaboration.

Council has made significant progress through the year, and I would like to thank our Management and staff for their ongoing dedication in achieving such great outcomes while continuing to support our communities.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank my fellow Councillors for their commitment and ongoing support throughout the past year enabling the Northern Midlands to continue to be a leader in growth and development.



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5 DECLARATIONS INTEREST

In accordance with

- part 5 of the *Local Government Act 1993*,
 - in particular, section 48(2) of the *Local Government Act 1993*;
- regulation 8 of the *Local Government (Meeting Procedures) Regulations 2015*;
- schedule 1, part 2 of the *Local Government (Code of Conduct) Order 2024*; and
- Council's adopted Code of Conduct for Elected Members;

the Mayor requests Councillors and staff to indicate whether they have, or are likely to have, an interest in any item on the Agenda.

No Annual General Meeting Declarations of Interest were received.



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6 PROCEDURAL

6.1 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

6.1.1 Confirmation Of Minutes: Annual General Meeting

MINUTE NO. 24/0396

DECISION

Cr Adams/Cr Archer

That the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Northern Midlands Council held at the Council Chambers, Longford on Monday, 11 December 2023, be confirmed as a true record of proceedings.

Carried Unanimously

Voting for the Motion:

Mayor Knowles, Deputy Mayor Lambert, Cr Adams, Cr Andrews, Cr Archer, Cr Brooks and Cr Terrett

Voting Against the Motion:

Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Northern Midlands Council held at the Council Chambers, Longford on Monday, 11 December 2023, be confirmed as a true record of proceedings.

6.2 PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS: ANNUAL REPORT

The Annual Report for the 2023/2024 financial year was circulated by the General Manager.

The notice of the Annual General Meeting together with the Annual Report was advertised in the Examiner Newspaper on Saturday, 23 November 2024 and Wednesday, 27 November 2024. The community were invited to submit comments on the Annual Report for discussion at the Annual General Meeting.

No submissions were received.

The Mayor noted that no public submissions were received.

MINUTE NO. 24/0397

DECISION

Deputy Mayor Lambert/Cr Andrews

That Council resolve to accept the 2023-2024 Annual Report.

Carried Unanimously

Voting for the Motion:

Mayor Knowles, Deputy Mayor Lambert, Cr Adams, Cr Andrews, Cr Archer, Cr Brooks and Cr Terrett

Voting Against the Motion:

Nil



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6.3 QUESTIONS

6.3.1 Question On Notice

6.3.1.1 Mr Jason Horton - Expenditure

The following questions on notice were received from Mr Jason Horton, Devon Hills for this Meeting:

1. On page 99 of the Annual report there is a note that says that the Council has settled with the Airport Corporations their challenge regarding payment of rates has costed council \$705,000. What was the total cost of this action against the Airport Corporation to the Northern Midlands Council?
2. The Northern Midlands Council is reported in the media to have expended a large amounts of money on legal costs. In the annual report there is no amount highlighted. What was the final amount of legal expenditure by the Northern Midlands Council in 2023/24?

The following responses have been provided:

1. *The total cost of action against the Airport Corporation from 2019 to 2024 was \$1,133,017 excluding GST.*
2. *The total amount of legal expenditure in 2023/24 was \$1,155,602 excluding GST.
The total amount of legal expenditure in 2023/24 excluding Airport legal costs was \$368,117 excluding GST.*

6.3.1.2 Mr Russell McKenzie - Expenditure and South Esk River

The following questions on notice were received from Mr Russell McKenzie, Perth for this Meeting:

1. In what [way] will the NMC ensure total accountability to the rate payers of the NMC for how our rates are spent?
2. How can the community work [with] the NMC to improve and maintain the South Esk River [at] Perth?

The following responses have been provided:

1. *Council reports monthly on it's recurrent expenditure.
Council's accounts are audited annually by the Auditor General, with internal reviews undertaken.
The Annual Financial Statements are then included in the Annual Report.*
2. *Council's responsibility is associated with the reserve area.
Council maintains the William Street Reserve and propose further upgrades to the South Esk River Parklands, depending upon availability of Council funds and the success in attracting external funds.
External groups within various committees, support improvement to the area by way of requests to Council and also seeking to attract external funds/support to assist to fund improvements.*



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6.3.1.3 Mrs Maree Smith - Playground Facilities

The following question on notice was received from Mrs Maree Smith, Perth for this Meeting:

It was stated in The Northern Courier that Council intend to construct a playground at Napoleon St., Perth which will be a great benefit to the community and greatly appreciated. The article indicated that toilet facilities at the site would not be constructed at the same time and this would potentially be followed at a later date.

I wish to ask why this isn't included at the same time as construction of playground as previous experience with the lack of toilet facilities at Seccombe Street Perth playground would indicate that this is a necessity from the time of opening of the playground to the public.

Surely this a health and wellbeing requirement for a public facility which is not in close proximity to other public toilets.

The following response has been provided:

Due to budget constraints, the park will be constructed in stages so that it can be used by the public.

Construction is estimated to cost \$700,000. Council was successful in receiving part of the grant funding it applied for, to the value of \$127,695.

At its July meeting, Council endorsed \$300,000 towards the new park, and consideration for the remainder to be budgeted in the 2025-2026 Municipal budget.

Construction will progress over two financial years, pending Councillors approving the 2025-26 Municipal Budget.



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6.3.2 Questions Without Notice

Questions without notice welcomed by Mayor Knowles, to be conducted in accordance with the following guidelines:

- A person seeking to ask a question must firstly identify himself or herself by stating their name and the town they reside in
- If more than one person wishes to ask a question, the Mayor is to determine the order in which those questions are asked
- Questions must be directed to the Mayor who shall answer or direct the question to the appropriate Councillor or Council Officer. A question will be answered if the information is known otherwise taken on notice and responded to in writing within 10 working days. Questions should preferably be in writing and provided to the General Manager at the Council Meeting
- A person is entitled to ask no more than two questions on any specific subject. If a person has up to two questions on several subjects, the Mayor may defer those questions until other questions have been asked and refer back to that person only if time permits
- Each speaker is limited to a maximum of 3 minutes.

No questions without notice were received.



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6.4 MOTIONS

6.4.1 Motions On Notice

A paper attendance register will be made available for completion by prior to the meeting at reception and at the commencement of the meeting upon the table at the entrance to the Council Chambers.

Note: Only attendees who are electors within the Northern Midlands municipal area are entitled to register and vote at the Annual General Meeting.

The following extract from *Local Government Act 1993, Section 72B - Annual General Meeting*, legislation is applicable:

...

(4) Only electors in the municipal area are entitled to vote at an Annual General Meeting.

(5) A motion at an Annual General Meeting is passed by a majority of votes taken by a show of hands or by any other means of ascertaining the vote the council determines.

(6) A motion passed at an Annual General Meeting is to be considered at the next meeting of the council.

...

The procedure relating to the receipt of Motions On Notice follows:

- Motions On Notice received prior to the issue of the AGM Agenda have been included within the Agenda and are listed in Item 6.4.1
- Electors who have put forward a Motion On Notice will be called upon at the prescribed time, at which time the Mover of the Motion On Notice will be invited to propose their motion and seek a to have the motion seconded by a registered elector
- Once seconded, the motion will then be put to the gallery by the Mayor
- All persons wishing to vote either for or against the motion must be registered as electors within the Northern Midlands municipal area
- The vote will be taken by a show of hands
- If the motion is carried by a majority of the registered electors present, a report will be prepared for the 20 January 2025 Council meeting.
- A maximum of 3 minutes is to be allowed in relation to debate on each Motion On Notice.



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6.4.1.1 Motion on Notice - Perth Train Park

Responsible Officer: Des Jennings, General Manager

The following Motion on Notice has been received from Ralph McGee, President and Sue Field, Train Park Project Officer on behalf of the Perth Lions Club.

MINUTE NO. 24/0398

DECISION

Ms Field/Mr Leighton

That Council Officers prepare a report to be presented to the next Council Meeting on the following Motion on Notice:
That Council agrees to finish the work required at Perth Train Park in consultation with the Perth Lions Club to make it more family friendly and to make it celebration of the history of trains and Perth.

Carried Unanimously

Voting for the Motion:

Mayor Knowles, Deputy Mayor Lambert, Cr Adams, Cr Andrews, Cr Archer, Cr Brooks and Cr Terrett

Electors Voting for the Motion:

Ms Field, Mr Leighton, Ms Baker, Ms Lawson, Ms Kensitt

Voting Against the Motion:

Nil

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

That Council Officers prepare a report to be presented to the next Council Meeting on the following Motion on Notice:
That Council agrees to finish the work required at Perth Train Park in consultation with the Perth Lions Club to make it more family friendly and to make it celebration of the history of trains and Perth.

Ralph McGee, President and Sue Field, Train Park Project Officer on behalf of the Perth Lions Club have submitted the following Motion on Notice for the Annual General Meeting to be held on 9 December 2024.

NOTICE OF MOTION

That Council agrees to finish the work required at Perth Train Park in consultation with the Perth Lions Club to make it more family friendly and to make it a celebration of the history of trains and Perth.

BACKGROUND

Ongoing efforts from Perth Lions Club have been focussed on building covered seating areas for families to enjoy a picnic. Now that there are more barbeques and no seating in the original shelter, separate shelters are required. The Lions shelter from Norfolk Street Park has never been replaced as promised. The Lions Club also built the fence on Little Mulgrave St and once again it has been removed and not replaced. The fence is required to keep young children in the park and away from the road.

The Train Park is a small park and cannot include all the equipment that is found in other parks but it can be a different park by focusing on trains and history, which helps to make it a tourist attraction as well as an asset for Perth.



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6.4.1.2 Motion on Notice - Promote and Preserve History of Perth

Responsible Officer: Des Jennings, General Manager

The following Motion on Notice has been received from the Perth Tasmania Historical Society.

MINUTE NO. 24/0399

DECISION

Ms Field/Mr Leighton

That Council Officers prepare a report to be presented to the next Council Meeting on the following Motion on Notice:

The Northern Midlands Council agrees to support projects that preserve and promote the history of the township of Perth.

Carried Unanimously

Voting for the Motion:

Mayor Knowles, Deputy Mayor Lambert, Cr Adams, Cr Andrews, Cr Archer, Cr Brooks and Cr Terrett

Electors Voting for the Motion:

Ms Field, Mr Leighton, Ms Baker, Ms Lawson, Ms Kensitt

Voting Against the Motion:

Nil

OFFICERS RECOMMENDATION

That Council Officers prepare a report to be presented to the next Council Meeting on the following Motion on Notice:

The Northern Midlands Council agrees to support projects that preserve and promote the history of the township of Perth.

The Perth Tasmania Historical Society have submitted the following Notice of Motion for the Annual General Meeting to be held on 9 December 2024.:

NOTICE OF MOTION

The Northern Midlands Council agrees to support projects that preserve and promote the history of the township of Perth.

BACKGROUND

Background: Ongoing efforts from community members and groups to preserve and promote Perth's important history are deserving of increasing recognition and support from the Northern Midland's Council. These efforts include the Perth Community Hub, historical interpretive signage around Perth, and online sources of information related to the history of the town.

The recent community archaeological dig at Skyview estate in Napoleon Street in Perth is demonstrative of both the history in Perth and the community's interest in such history. The previous community dig at the Perth Convict Probation Gaol in 2023 is also consistent with the important social and cultural history in the township.

It is worth noting that several historic buildings and sites are not easily accessible to the public, such as Eskleigh, formerly Scone, and the Perth Probation Station, now Sustainable Timber Tasmania. Gibbet Hill is the site of the last gibbeting in the British Commonwealth – a site of international social and criminological importance – and to date little effort has been made to preserve or promote this landmark. There is a dearth of sources, such as signs, that detail the area prior to European settlement.

The NMC should work to recognise Perth's important social and cultural history and support community efforts to preserve and promote this history.



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6.4.2 Motions Without Notice

A paper attendance register will be made available for completion by prior to the meeting at reception and at the commencement of the meeting upon the table at the entrance to the Council Chambers.

Note: Only attendees who are electors within the Northern Midlands municipal area are entitled to register and vote at the Annual General Meeting.

Motions Without Notice from electors welcomed by Mayor Knowles.

The following extract from *Local Government Act 1993, Section 72B - Annual General Meeting*, legislation is applicable:

...

(4) Only electors in the municipal area are entitled to vote at an Annual General Meeting.

(5) A motion at an Annual General Meeting is passed by a majority of votes taken by a show of hands or by any other means of ascertaining the vote the council determines.

(6) A motion passed at an Annual General Meeting is to be considered at the next meeting of the council.

...

The procedure relating to the receipt of Motions Without Notice follows:

- An elector proposing to put forward a Motion Without Notice at the meeting is to register their intent with the Mayor and provide a copy of the proposed Motion to the Mayor at the commencement of the meeting
- At the prescribed time, the Mover of the Motion Without Notice will be invited to propose their motion and seek a to have the motion seconded by a registered elector
- Once seconded, the motion will then be put to the gallery by the Mayor
- All persons wishing to vote either for or against the motion must be registered as electors within the Northern Midlands
- The vote will be taken by a show of hands
- If the motion is carried by a majority of the registered electors present a report will be prepared for the 20 January 2025 Council meeting.
- A maximum of 3 minutes is to be allowed in relation to debate on each Motion Without Notice.

[No Motions Without Notice were received.](#)



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7 CLOSURE

Mayor Knowles closed the meeting at 5.30pm.

MAYOR _____ DATE _____

Commentary & Questions NMC Annual Report for AGM 15 December 2025

Review of Northern Midlands Council

Annual Report 2024/2025

Executive Overview

The Northern Midlands Council's Annual Report 2024/25 is a comprehensive "report card" on Council's performance, strategic progress, financial health, risks, and service delivery over the past year. In plain terms, it tells residents and ratepayers what Council did with their rates and grants, how key projects fared, and whether the Council is on track for the future. Overall, the report shows a busy year of infrastructure upgrades and planning initiatives, supported by significant external funding, but also flags an **operating budget shortfall** that will need attention.

Council achieved a mix of notable successes in 2024/25. Major capital works were delivered, from road upgrades to new recreational facilities, improving amenities across the municipality. The Council advanced several **strategic initiatives** (e.g. a new Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Economic Development Strategy) to guide future development. Community services expanded, notably with a new childcare centre at Perth and other programs benefiting families and youth. The Report indicates that the **municipality's population grew** about 1% to 14,428, bucking state trends, and Council is planning for growth in towns like Perth (expected to nearly double by 2041). Importantly, Council finished the year with no debt, having repaid its only loan, and continues to maintain healthy cash reserves.

On the other hand, the Annual Report reveals some **areas of concern** that matter to residents. Most significantly, Council ran a **\$2.6 million operating deficit** once capital grants are excluded. In simple terms, everyday expenses exceeded everyday income, meaning Council relied on grants and one-off asset sales to cover the gap. This structural deficit, if left unchecked, could affect Council's ability to maintain services or infrastructure in the long run. The report shows Council is **highly reliant on government grants**, which made up 21% of its revenue, great while available, but a risk if funding programs change. Another insight is that while Council spent heavily on new assets and upgrades (boosting the year's accounting surplus to \$14.6 million), it must keep up with renewing existing roads, bridges, and facilities. Asset renewal spending was about 97% of depreciation this year (just below the ideal 100%), and averaged 98% over four years, generally on track, but requiring ongoing vigilance to avoid a maintenance backlog.

The Annual Report is mostly candid and detailed, meeting statutory reporting requirements (e.g., it discloses Councillor allowances, meeting attendances, grants, and the Auditor's opinion). However, it did omit the required detail: the total cost of Code of Conduct complaints was not stated, even though 9 complaints were lodged (with 1 upheld) during the year. This is a compliance gap and a matter of public interest, given the potential legal and administrative costs involved. Governance-wise, the prevalence of Code of Conduct issues suggests the need for improved councillor conduct or conflict resolution measures.

Commentary & Questions NMC Annual Report for AGM 15 December 2025

The annual report fails to make any mention of the Supreme Court of Tasmania case regarding the payment of legal expenses of the Mayor or General Manager and the repayment of ratepayer funds. Nor does it mention the recommendations of the Independent Review of Governance and Meeting Processes and the findings of this report.

Bottom Line. Northern Midlands Council appears **financially stable in the short term**, it has a strong asset base, no debt, and is delivering on strategic projects. The Council is strategically on track, leveraging grants to build community infrastructure and planning for future growth.

However, **the underlying operating deficit is the key red flag**, current service levels are not fully funded by current income, which is a sustainability challenge. In summary, Council is doing many things well for the community, but it will need to boost revenue or trim costs (or both) to ensure long-term financial health. The following key takeaways distil what matters most from the Annual Report for Northern Midlands residents and ratepayers:

- **Major Projects Delivered.** Council invested \$12.4million in capital works, upgrading roads, parks and facilities across the district. Notable completions include the new Longford Laycock Street Park and playground and half-court sports facilities in Cressy, Perth, Ross, and Longford, plus progress on the Perth and Campbell Town main street redevelopments. These projects improve local amenities and safety.
- **Strategic Initiatives Progressing.** Council adopted and pursued new strategic plans (Economic Development Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Youth Strategy, Arts and Culture Strategy, Community and Engagement Strategy) aligned with the community's long-term goals. It also actively advocated funding and partnerships, for example securing federal support for a proposed TransLink intermodal freight facility, a potential future economic driver.

These Strategies need to be adequately funded. The failure to allocate financial and other resources needs to be reported to council on a regular basis. The strategies must be time lined and measurable outcomes and KPIs established.

- **Community Services Expanded.** The Council opened a new Perth Early Learning Centre in 2024, increasing childcare and after-school care capacity for local families. It continued running programs like the Midlands Kids Club and supported events (e.g. the Pacific Islander community festival, Australia Day celebrations) that enrich community life. These efforts indicate Council's commitment to community wellbeing and inclusion. Concern is raised that despite this growth with Community Services; Council has failed to appoint a Community Service Manager.
- **Operating Deficit, Caution Ahead.** Despite a large headline surplus, the Council's **underlying result was a \$2.603m deficit for 2024/25**. Essentially, routine operating costs (including depreciation on assets) exceeded the revenue raised from rates, fees, and regular grants. This gap widened from the previous year. Such a trend is **unsustainable long-term** unless addressed, as it could draw down Council's cash reserves or limit its ability to renew assets and services in future.

Commentary & Questions NMC Annual Report for AGM 15 December 2025

- **No Debt, Healthy Reserves.** On a positive note, Council is **debt-free** after repaying its last \$3m loan, and had about **\$17 million in cash and investments** as at June 30, 2025. This strong financial buffer gives Council time to fix the operating imbalance and funds to invest in priority projects. Net assets climbed to \$569m after asset revaluation, a sign of growing community infrastructure value.
- **Reliance on External Grants.** Approximately **21% of Council's income was from government grants in 2024/25**, not counting substantial capital grants for projects. Grants enable big projects (like the \$8 million Campbell Town & Perth streetscape upgrades) without burdening ratepayers, but the community should note that Council's capital program is heavily grant-dependent. Future grant funding changes could impact on project delivery or require more local funding.
- **Infrastructure Maintained (Asset Renewal).** Council is keeping up with asset renewals overall. It spent about **97% of depreciation on renewing existing assets** this year (4-year average 98%), close to the recommended 100% for sustainability. Road, bridge, and stormwater networks are in good shape on average (around 73–74% remaining life). This suggests Council is not accumulating a hidden infrastructure deficit, a crucial sign of long-term viability.
- **Projects Deferred & Future Works.** Some planned works were delayed or carried forward (e.g. certain street reconstructions in Campbell Town and Perth), meaning residents in those areas will see **those upgrades later than expected**. Council's Annual Plan tables note a few initiatives "Not progressed" due to lack of budget or other issues. It will be important for Council to communicate new timelines and ensure these projects stay on the agenda.
- **Governance and Transparency.** The Annual Report largely meets transparency obligations, listing Councillor allowances (\$250k) and meeting attendance (88.9% average), detailing grants, donations, and including the Auditor's clean opinion. However, 9 Code of Conduct complaints were lodged against councillors, a concern for governance. Ratepayers would expect Council to address the underlying causes of these complaints. Also, the report **did not disclose the total cost incurred** from these complaints, a required detail, which the community may seek to know. Improving conduct and fully reporting on such matters are key to public trust.

The Annual Report does not give full transparency to the findings from the Supreme Court of Tasmania regarding the **payment of legal expenses** and does not acknowledge **the Independent Review of Governance and Meeting Processes** and actions taken on the recommendation of this review.

In conclusion, the Northern Midlands Council's Annual Report reflects a Council that is **active and achieving many goals** for its communities, while also signalling the need for **financial fine-tuning**. Residents can take heart that services and infrastructure are being enhanced but should also stay engaged on how Council plans to secure its long-term financial sustainability. The upcoming Submission delves deeper into these points and translates them into questions and recommendations for Council's consideration.

Review and Findings

Compliance with Local Government Act 1993 (Section 72 Requirements)

The Annual Report appears to substantially comply with Tasmania's Local Government Act 1993 Section 72 reporting obligations, covering most of the required content:

- **Context and Overview.** The report opens with a contextual profile of the Northern Midlands (history, geography, demographics), fulfilling the requirement to describe the context in which Council operated.
- **Summary of Annual Plan & Priorities.** It explicitly states that the Annual Plan objectives (drawn from the Strategic Plan 2021–2027) are set out along with performance for each activity. The “Major Strategic Issues” section (pp.23–30) and subsequent pages detail how Council addressed key priorities from the Annual Plan in 2024/25.
- **Council's Operations and Achievements.** The bulk of the report (pp.23–75) is devoted to reporting Council's operations, services, and achievements across all departments. It is structured by objectives with “Performance” narratives and data under each (e.g., Recreation objective and projects, Animal Control stats, Development activity, etc.). This satisfies Section 72(1)(b) by describing what Council did and how it performed against the year's goals.
- **Public Health Goals and Outcomes.** An Environmental Health Statement is included, highlighting Council's commitment to community health (e.g. notifiable disease control, immunisations) and noting \$131,760 spent on public health projects in 2024/25. It references the detailed Community Health Report sections on pages 47 and 56. This addresses the requirement (Section 72(1) (ab)) to report on public health goals and performance.
- **Annual Financial Statements & Audit Opinion.** A complete set of audited financial statements for 2024/25 is included (pp. 91–121), along with the Independent Auditor's Report on page 122. The Acting General Manager's certification of the financial report is also provided, dated 30 October 2025. This meets the requirement to include the financial statements and the audit opinion (Section 72(1)(c) and (d)).
- **Councillor Allowances and Expenses.** The report provides a statement of total allowances and expenses paid to the Mayor, Deputy and Councillors: \$250,821 in 2024/25 (versus \$253,479 the previous year). A further breakdown by individual is referenced on page 14. This satisfies Section 72(1) (cb).
- **Councillor Meeting Attendance.** Councillor attendance at Council and committee meetings is documented. The report refers readers to a table on page 15 detailing each Councillor's attendance record, thereby complying with Section 72(1)(cc).

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- **Senior Employee Remuneration.** A remuneration statement for senior positions is included by reference to Note 10.1 of the Financial Statements. That note discloses the number of senior employees in salary bands (e.g. 3 senior staff with total remuneration in specified ranges), meeting Section 72(1)(cd).
- **Donations & Grants (Section 77) and Rate Remissions.** The report lists all grants and benefits provided by Council. It specifies that donations under Section 77 of the Act are detailed on pages 41, 50, and 52 (with recipients and amounts). It also discloses rate remissions granted (\$7,479 in 2024/25). This fulfills the requirement to report grants, benefits and rate remissions.

Section 77 1A (b) defines donations and gifts as (b) *fully or partially reduced fees, rates or charges*. The report does not disclose discounts for halls and facilities hired given from time to time. The discounts can be substantial and disclosure of these would add to accountability and transparency.
- **Land Donated (Section 177).** Council states it made no donations of land in 2024/25 under Section 177 of the Act, satisfying Section 72(1) (da) (even if nil, the nil return is documented).
- **Public Interest Disclosures.** While not a Section 72 requirement but good practice, the report includes a Public Interest Disclosures statement. It shows that no disclosures were made or investigated under the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2002 during the year (all entries “Nil”).
- **Right to Information.** Similarly, the report notes that seven Right to Information requests were received in 2024/25.
- **Contracts & Tenders.** Regulation 29 of the Local Government (General) Regulations 2015 requires councils to report certain contract details. The Annual Report contains a section “Tenders and Contracts” (p. 83–85) where tenders awarded and instances of non- application of the public tender process are listed with contractor names, addresses and contract values. This fulfills the tender disclosure requirements.

Exceptions/Areas for Improvement. The one notable compliance gap is that the Annual Report does not state the total costs met by Council in 2024/25 for all Code of Conduct complaints, as required by Section 72(1) (bb). The report discloses the number of complaints (nine) and how many were upheld (one), but it omits the aggregate dollar cost incurred (e.g. investigation or legal fees). This should have been included for full compliance. Another minor omission is the lack of an explicit statement on Section 21 enterprise powers activities. Section 72(1)(ca) requires reporting any council enterprises. The Northern Midlands Council likely had no such commercial enterprises in 2024/25; however, best practice would be to state “no activities under Section 21 were undertaken,” for completeness (the report is silent on this point).

In summary, aside from the Code of Conduct cost detail, the Annual Report meets the statutory reporting obligations of Section 72. It provides a transparent account of Council's performance and finances, with extensive data and adherence to legislated disclosures. Ensuring that all required particulars (even “nil” entries) are included in future reports will maintain full compliance.

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Progress Against Strategic Plan and Annual Plan Priorities

The report indicates that Council made solid progress on its Strategic Plan 2021–2027 goals during 2024/25, as operationalised through the Annual Plan. There is clear alignment between strategic objectives and the activities reported:

- **Major Strategic Issues.** Early in the report, Council identifies key strategic issues it focused on in 2024/25, derived from the Strategic Plan. These included Economic Development, Sustainable Development (incl. climate action), Community Wellbeing, Future Funding and more. For each, the report narrates Council's efforts. For example, under Economic Development, it notes Council's adoption of a Northern Tasmania Economic Development Strategy and local Economic Development Strategy (April 2024) and partnership initiatives to boost the region's economy. Under Community Wellbeing, it highlights the new Health & Wellbeing Strategy (adopted April 2024) and advocacy for a Longford community house, among other actions. This narrative demonstrates that Council is actively working on the priorities set out in its Strategic Plan, however these strategies need adequate resourcing.
- **Annual Plan Actions.** The Annual Plan's specific actions for the year are reported on, typically in a tabular or list format with their status. For instance, the report contains a section (around p.33–38) listing Year 2 (2024/25) strategic projects and whether they are "Ongoing", "Complete", etc. As an example, one action was to "Produce an Annual Report that informs the community of achievements and how monies have been expended", marked as Ongoing (and indeed, this Annual Report is that deliverable). Many actions are noted as completed or ongoing, suggesting steady implementation. There are a few instances of "Not progressed" or deferred initiatives, for example, one entry shows no budget allocation in 2024/25 for an arts and culture project, marked "Not progressed".
- **Key Achievements 2024/25.** On page 76, the report provides a summarised list of Key Achievements. These bullet-point highlights give a clear sense of tangible outcomes delivered. They include:
 - Construction of a new shared pathway from Longford Village Green to Mill Dam (with a \$1.38 million federal Community Development Grant).
 - Commencement of the Youngtown to Breadalbane cycling/walking trail (grant- funded by \$436k from Active Transport program).
 - Completion of a "playground for all ages" at Laycock Street Park in Longford (funded by \$500k from the federal LRCI program).
 - Expansion of the Ross Community Men's Shed with a \$150k federal grant.
 - Installation of half-court basketball/netball facilities in four towns and a new junior playground at Campbell Town War Memorial Oval (supported by a \$100k State grant).
 - Upgrades at Perth Recreation Ground (new junior soccer field, with \$70k grant).
 - Traffic safety improvements in Perth (raised crossing near Secombe St Reserve, funded by a \$50k grant).
 - Street and drainage infrastructure upgrades in Cressy (with \$150k State election commitment).

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This list, directly tied to strategic objectives like recreation, health, and safety, evidences robust progress. It also shows Council's success in leveraging external funding to achieve Annual Plan projects (each item notes an assisting grant source).

- Long-Term Strategic Moves.** The report describes steps taken on longer-term initiatives, not just one-year projects. For instance, Council worked with the Northern Tasmanian Alliance for Resilient Councils on climate change risk assessments and continued planning the TransLink intermodal freight facility (which has \$5 million for planning and a further \$30 million contingent on outcomes). It also applied for grants like the Community Energy Upgrade Fund for energy efficiency at the Sports Centre. These indicate progress toward broader strategic goals in economic growth, climate resilience, and sustainability.
- Areas Needing Attention.** While achievements are well documented, the report's format sometimes emphasises **outputs over outcomes**. For example, many actions are listed as "Ongoing" with **no target completion date or specific performance measure beyond completion status**. Also, there is no explicit assessment of whether strategic targets (if any were set in the Strategic Plan) are on track, the report provides the narrative and outputs, but not a KPI dashboard against Strategic Plan targets. An area for improvement is to include brief evaluative comments on whether each strategic priority is "Achieved", "On Track" or "Behind", rather than just describing activities.
- Deferred Initiatives.** A few strategic or annual plan items were deferred. For example, the Longford Town Hall website upgrade allocation was noted as under consideration but marked Ongoing into next year. The report does not highlight any major strategic goal that was abandoned, but for full accountability it might have noted why certain projects were postponed (e.g., resource constraints or awaiting external funding).

In conclusion, the Annual Report demonstrates strong alignment between planned priorities and actions taken. Council has been proactive in execution; many infrastructure projects and community programs planned for 2024/25 were delivered or progressed. The heavy incorporation of grant-funded projects also shows strategic opportunism in achieving plan objectives without overextending Council finances. To strengthen future reporting, Council could incorporate explicit success indicators for strategic plan goals (e.g. target vs actual for key metrics) to more clearly show how annual actions move the needle on long-term outcomes.

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Quality and Measurability of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

The Annual Report provides a wealth of data on activities and outputs, but the quality and measurability of performance indicators can be assessed as mixed:

- **Operational Metrics Provided.** The report includes numerous tables of “Specific data 2024/25 vs previous years” for different service areas. For example:
 - Animal management. number of dog registrations (3,872), kennel licenses, and impounded animals each year for the past three years.
 - Development services. number of planning applications approved (225), broken down by type (dwellings, additions, etc.), and the value of developments, plus processing times for permits (all averaging 7–8 days).
 - Building compliance. number of inspections, septic applications, etc. over 3 years.
 - Environmental health. statistics on notifiable disease investigations, immunisations delivered, water quality tests, food premises inspections, etc., with three-year trends.
 - Corporate services. total payroll costs for the past three years (\$9.65m in 2024/25, up from \$8.46m), and other internal metrics.

These data points are valuable and show trends. They serve as de-facto KPIs for volume of work and service activity levels.

- **Lack of Targets or Benchmarks.** The report generally does not set explicit targets or benchmarks for these metrics, which limit their evaluative power. For instance, we see dog registrations fell from 4,229 to 3,872 over three years, but there is no commentary on why or what the target was (if any). Similarly, planning approval numbers are given without context (e.g. was an increase expected or desired?). The **underlying surplus ratio** is an exception where a benchmark (0% or above) is implied, and the report explicitly states the ratio was –10%, flagging a deficit. But in most service areas, the numbers are standalone. This makes it hard for readers to judge performance as “good/bad” or “on/of track.” Including targets (from the Annual Plan or strategic KPIs) or at least prior-year goals would greatly enhance measurability.
- **Narrative vs Numeric Evaluation.** Much of the performance reporting is narrative. Each objective has a “Performance:” section describing actions taken, rather than quantifiable outcomes. For example, under Regulatory Compliance, the performance notes that Council responds to complaints, promotes compliance, and lists policy reviews carried out (Mobile Food Vendors policy, etc.). This tells us what was done, but not how effectively outcomes were achieved (no metrics on, say, reduction in complaints or compliance rates). The narratives are informative but often lack a success metric or completion percentage.

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- **Completion Status as a Proxy KPI.** In some cases, the report uses project completion as the measure of performance (which is valid for one-off tasks). The Key Achievements list implicitly rates those items as completed. The Annual Plan action tables indicate if actions are Complete, Ongoing, Deferred, etc. This is a clear, binary measure of output (either the task was done or not). It works well for project delivery tracking. However, for broader outcomes (like “improve community wellbeing”), completion of tasks does not necessarily measure the outcome (health metrics, etc., are not reported).
- **Inconsistency / Data Accuracy Issues.** There is a minor inconsistency spotted in the financial KPI commentary. The management indicators note correctly shows an underlying deficit of \$2.603m for 2024/25. But the commentary below it erroneously states “Council has achieved a positive result in the current year”. This appears to be a carry-over mistake (perhaps meant for a previous year) and contradicts the data, which actually shows a negative underlying result. This inconsistency suggests a need for more careful QA of the report’s narrative. While it doesn’t affect the actual figures, it could mislead an inattentive reader. Highlighting such discrepancies is important for maintaining credibility in KPI reporting.
- **No Community Satisfaction or Quality KPIs.** Notably absent are any direct community satisfaction or service quality indicators. Many councils include survey results or response times (e.g. % of customer requests resolved within target timeframe). Northern Midlands’ report does show the total number of customer service requests (1,224 in 2024/25) and breaks them down by department in a graph, but it does not say how quickly they were handled or how satisfied residents were. Also, while the report lists training completed by councillors and staff, it doesn’t measure, for example, staff turnover or satisfaction. Including qualitative KPIs (like satisfaction ratings, engagement levels, etc.) would round out the picture of performance.
- **Positive Note, Audit Indicators.** The financial sustainability indicators (underlying surplus ratio, asset ratios, etc.) are clearly presented with benchmarks. This is a strong point of the report’s KPI section. It allows a measured evaluation of Council’s fiscal and asset management performance against industry benchmarks. For instance, one can readily see the asset sustainability ratio was 97% vs benchmark 100%, prompting a discussion on renewal spending. Such clarity is commendable.

In summary, the Annual Report provides extensive performance data, but the KPIs are mostly descriptive or workload-oriented without defined targets or evaluative commentary. The measures are measurable in that they are numeric, but their meaningfulness is limited by the lack of context. Future reports could enhance KPI quality by:

- Stating annual targets or service level standards and then actual results (for example: “Target: 90% of permits processed within 42 days; Actual: 95% achieved”).
- Including community outcome measures (e.g. survey results, or health/crime stats if relevant to programs).
- Ensuring consistency between narrative and data (avoid any contradictory statements).

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- Providing brief analysis of trends (explaining significant drops or increases in metrics and what is being done in response).

Overall, the raw data is there (which is good for transparency), but the interpretation and assessment aspect of KPIs could be improved to truly measure Council's performance in a way that is understandable to the community.

Financial Analysis: Operating Results, Capital Delivery, Cash Flow, Debt, Reserves, Asset Renewals

Operating Results (Income & Expenditure). Council's Statement of Comprehensive Income (Profit/Loss) illustrates two very different pictures: a large accounting surplus and a significant underlying deficit. On an accounting basis, Council had a **\$14.59 million surplus (net result) for 2024/25**. This surplus was driven by extraordinary income, notably:

- **\$14.44 million in capital grants** for new/upgraded assets (compared to ~\$5.7m expected).
- \$0.376 million in non-monetary asset contributions (infrastructure gifted by developers). By contrast, operating revenue (rates, regular grants, fees, interest, etc.) was \$24.53 million, while operating expenses were \$26.62 million (excluding one-offs). This yields an underlying **operating deficit of \$2.603 million for 2024/25**. In other words, after removing capital funding, the Council spent about \$2.6M more than it earned in delivering services and depreciation. This is a deterioration from the prior year's underlying deficit of \$0.758 million. The deficit equates to roughly 10% of recurrent revenue, which is substantial, indicating that current revenue would need to increase by 10% (or expenses reduce) to break even.

Major operating cost areas contributing to expenses were Employee benefits (\$8.50m), Materials & services (\$6.33m), and Depreciation (\$7.65m). Employee costs rose about \$0.56m from prior year, reflective of new staff or pay increases (the GM's message cites a new Enterprise Agreement to improve remuneration). Materials and other costs were fairly stable or slightly down on last year. The big swing factor on the income side was grants: Council's **Financial Assistance Grants** from federal/state sources for operations increased, but interest earnings on investments dropped (interest on rates went from \$416k last year to \$88k, likely due to policy changes or less arrears).

The bottom-line concern is that recurrent expenditure exceeded recurrent income by a notable margin. Council acknowledges this in Note 10.3, stating an underlying deficit and a negative underlying surplus ratio of -10%. They also note **Council has had a negative underlying result in 3 of the last 4 years (excluding 2021/22)**. This trend poses a structural financial risk if not addressed, as it means Council is not fully funding depreciation or other costs from its own revenue.

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It's worth noting the Annual Budget for 2024/25 anticipated this challenge. The General Manager's message indicates Council budgeted for a \$7.8m accounting surplus but an "underlying deficit of \$1.0 million" after stripping capital grants. The actual underlying deficit turned out larger (~\$2.6m), partly because some operating revenues came in lower than expected (e.g., interest) and some costs like employee benefits were higher than budget. However, the substantial accounting surplus (actual \$14.6m vs budget ~\$5.9m) suggests capital grants exceeded expectations, a positive outcome that masks the operating shortfall.

Capital Works Delivery. Council had an ambitious capital works program in 2024/25, initially set at \$25.5 million (including projects carried forward). Actual capital expenditure totalled \$12.395 million for the year. The split was \$7.253m on renewing existing assets and \$5.142m on new or upgraded assets. Several high-value projects reached completion or significant progress:

- Road infrastructure projects consumed the most funds (\$6.06m), including reconstructions (e.g., Ashby Road near Ross) and safety improvements.
- Buildings capital spend was \$2.33m, including final works on facilities like the Perth Early Learning Centre and other building upgrades.
- Other notable spends: \$1.415m on fleet (plant replacement program), \$1.167m on land (likely strategic land purchases or preparatory works), and ~\$0.26m on drainage upgrades.

The gap between the \$25.5m planned and \$12.4m delivered suggests a number of project deferrals. Indeed, the Capital Projects Status (pages 82–85) lists some projects as "Deferred" or "Ongoing" at year-end. For example:

- Pedestrian outstands on Marlborough St and a Hobhouse St reconstruction were Deferred.
- Wellington/Youl road upgrade was deferred, but others like Burghley St sealing were completed.
- Various footpath, kerb, and stormwater projects are marked Ongoing into next year. The reasons are not detailed in the report, but common causes could be contractor availability, design delays, or awaiting grant timing. Importantly, no major funding appears lost, e.g., the Perth and Campbell Town Main Street upgrades funded by an \$8m federal grant are on track, with Perth ~80% complete and Campbell Town about to commence construction as of mid-2025. Council effectively managed multi-year projects by rolling them forward without budget blowouts noted.

It's also notable that **capital grants recognised (\$14.44m) exceeded capital spend (\$12.4m)**. This can happen when grant revenue is received upfront while actual construction will continue into next year (grant funds may sit in reserve to be spent). It contributes to cash holdings if unspent at year end.

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Cash Flows and Liquidity. Council's cash flow statement shows a net decrease of \$870k in cash during 2024/25. Keypoints:

- Net cash from operating activities was +\$4.09m (Council's operations still generated positive cash since depreciation is non-cash and capital grants are included in operating cash flow).
- Net cash used in investing (capital) activities was -\$1.96m. This relatively low figure reflects that a lot of the capital works were funded by grants; Council didn't have to use much of its own cash for investments, and some grant money for works in progress remains in cash.
- Net cash used in financing was -\$3.0m, entirely due to the repayment of borrowings.

As at 30 June 2025, Council's cash and cash equivalents were \$3.96 million. In addition, Council held \$13.34 million in longer-term financial assets (likely term deposits/investments). **Total liquid funds were thus about \$17.3 million, a strong liquidity position.** Current liabilities were only \$6.74m (mostly payables and provisions), giving a healthy working capital. The net financial assets position was +\$11.8m (liquid assets minus total liabilities), which is comfortably positive, indicating Council can meet all its obligations and then some.

Debt and Borrowings. Council eliminated its debt during the year. It had a \$3,000,000 short-term loan (classified as current borrowings at 30 June 2024), which it paid off in full in 2024/25. No new loans were taken, so at 30 June 2025, Council had zero borrowings on its balance sheet. This debt was likely a special purpose loan (possibly from state treasury for stimulus projects, given the mention of "Interest expense, stimulus loans" in the income statement). With no debt, Council saves on interest costs and has borrowing capacity in reserve if needed for future big projects. The Audit Indicators show Council's net financial liabilities ratio is -50% (negative, meaning a net asset position) which "falls well within Treasury benchmarks". Essentially, Council has **no liquidity or solvency concerns at present.**

Reserves and Equity. Council's equity consists of an accumulated surplus of \$200.47m and Reserves of \$368.94m as of 30 June 2025. The reserves are mostly the Asset Revaluation Reserve (\$368.56m) which grew by \$12.0m this year due to asset revaluations (especially a revaluation increment for roads/bridges). There is also a small "Other Reserves" balance (~\$0.38m) representing funds set aside for specific purposes. The negative balance in other reserves from the previous year (-\$462k) was rectified, now +\$375k, perhaps reflecting usage and replenishment of earmarked funds (e.g., carried-forward grant funds). The accumulated surplus increased by the net surplus amounted to \$200m. It is important to note that while overall equity is huge (\$569m), the vast majority is tied up in fixed assets (infrastructure). Unrestricted cash reserves (~\$17m) are healthy but not excessive relative to Council's \$26m annual spend (roughly 8 months' worth of operating costs).

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Asset Renewal and Sustainability

I examined whether Council is financing the renewal of assets adequately:

- The **Asset Sustainability Ratio** was 97% for 2024/25 (capex on asset renewals \$7.253m vs depreciation \$7.480m). Over the last four years, the ratio averages 98%, slightly below the desired 100% benchmark. Council explains the recent volatility: in 2022/23 the ratio was only 41% (because capital works were skewed to new/upgraded assets, like building projects, rather than renewals). In 2023/24, the ratio jumped to 131%, likely “catching up” on several deferred renewals. This suggests Council does not strictly spend an even amount on renewals each year but overall is maintaining its asset base over the medium term. The commentary notes Council focused on substantial upgrades to existing buildings which are counted as new capex, thus lowering the ratio, but not necessarily neglecting the assets (the assets were improved rather than like-for-like replaced).
- The **Asset Consumption Ratios** (condition of assets) are all above 60%, indicating assets on average have 60–75% of their useful life remaining. Roads/Bridges: 73% remaining, Buildings: 63%, Drainage: 74%. The building ratio falling to 63% (from 70%) is due to revaluation methods; still, it means buildings are on average 37% into their life, not bad, but worth monitoring older facilities.
- The **Asset Renewal Funding Ratio** (which compares the funding in the Long-Term Financial Plan to the requirements in the Asset Management Plans) is very high for all asset classes, exceeding 100% for Buildings, Roads and Drainage (164%, 105%, 116% respectively for 2025). This indicates that Council's long-term budgeting is more than sufficient to meet planned renewal needs. In fact, such high percentages suggest either the LTFP front-loads renewal spending or the Asset Management Plans are conservative. For example, Building renewals show 164%, possibly reflecting planned major refurbishments or replacements (like new childcare centre counted as building “renewal funding”) beyond what the asset plan strictly required. While exceeding 100% is not a problem per se (better over-provision than under), extremely high ratios in prior years (399% in 2022 for Buildings) hint that the asset management plan might not have anticipated some projects that the LTFP funded, possibly upgrades being counted. Regardless, it's clear Council is **not underfunding future renewals** in its planning.

Key Financial Sustainability Risks

- The **recurring operating deficit** is the primary risk. If unchecked, Council could gradually deplete its cash or be unable to fund asset renewals without external grants. Essentially, Council's own-source revenue (rates, fees) are not covering the full cost of services and asset depreciation. This risk is somewhat masked by the large surplus from capital grants, but it needs addressing via either revenue increases (rate growth, new fees) or cost containment. The Auditor-General and Office of Local Government generally view an underlying deficit for multiple years as a sign to prompt a sustainability review, even if current liquidity is fine.
- **Grant Dependency.** The financial success of 2024/25 was heavily grant-driven. Over \$14m in capital grants were received, without them, the capital program would have been much smaller, or the surplus would turn into a deficit. Operationally too, Financial Assistance Grants and other operating grants (~\$5.3m) are significant. Changes in grant formulas or one-off programs ending could stress Council's finances. This is mitigated by the fact that Council has low debt and could, if necessary, borrow or adjust capital spending. But long-term, relying on external funds for core activities can be risky if those funds wane.
- **Cost Pressures.** Employee costs rising ~14% in one year is notable. Part was planned (to improve staff pay competitiveness) and part due to filling positions. If such growth continues above revenue growth, it widens the deficit. The tight labour market and regulatory demands (mentioned in the report) have driven staffing increases. Council will need to watch productivity and perhaps **pursue resource-sharing or efficiency measures** to manage this.
- **Capital Project Management.** The deferral of some projects means a carry-forward of commitments. There is a minor risk of cost escalation on delayed works (inflation in construction is high). Council should ensure it has the capacity to deliver the big slate of projects it has been successful in funding. The report mentions that some works are on track for December 2026 deadlines shows awareness of timelines tied to grants. Proper project management is needed to avoid any rush or penalties.
- **No Borrowings, Opportunity Cost.** Having no debt is financially safe, but if major infrastructure is needed, Council might consider **leveraging debt strategically** (especially while interest rates for public bodies can be relatively low). The risk here is more opportunity risk, Council might be overly conservative in not using debt financing for intergenerational assets. That said, given the strong grant inflows, this hasn't been necessary yet.

In conclusion, **Council's financial position as of 30 June 2025 is sound in terms of solvency and assets, but the operating deficit is a structural weakness** that must be managed. The Council has wisely not accumulated debt and has maintained its assets, which gives it a strong platform to work from. To maintain long-term sustainability, attention should focus on closing the operating gap (through revenue measures like rate increases aligned with growth, or cost efficiencies) so that Council isn't dependent on unpredictable grants for its day-to-day viability.

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The financial analysis suggests that with modest adjustments, Northern Midlands Council can continue to be financially sustainable and strategically on track, but it must be proactive in its financial strategy to turn the underlying deficit around.

Asset Management Health (Roads, Stormwater, Buildings)

The Annual Report provides numerous indicators that Council's assets are in generally good condition and being managed responsibly. Key points on asset management health:

- **Inventory and Responsibility** Northern Midlands Council manages an extensive asset portfolio, befitting its large area. This includes **585 km of sealed roads and 385 km of unsealed roads**, at 970 km total, one of the largest local road networks in Tasmania. It also maintains 3 swimming pools, 4 waste transfer stations, 19 public toilets, 100 parks and reserves, and multiple community buildings (halls, information centres, etc.). The breadth of assets means asset management is a critical council function.
- **Asset Values and Revaluations** The report notes Council's infrastructure is valued at: \$135.4m in land and buildings, \$315.7m in roads and bridges, \$48.9m in stormwater infrastructure, and \$12.9m in other assets (parks equipment, WIP, etc.). These values saw an uptick from revaluations (e.g., roads were revalued during the year, increasing their carrying value by ~\$12 million). Regular revaluation ensures the asset register reflects true condition and lifecycle stage.
- **Asset Condition (Consumption)** As mentioned in the financial analysis, asset consumption ratios indicate the remaining useful life of assets:
 - Roads & Bridges. 73% of life remaining. This is robust, it implies on average these assets are only ~27% into their expected life. It suggests that past investment in road renewals (resurfacing, reconstructions) has kept the network relatively young. It also reflects the upgrades and new roads added (e.g., through subdivisions) which bring the average age down.
 - Stormwater/Drainage. 74% remaining. Similarly high, indicating drains and culverts are, on balance, far from end-of-life. Council has been proactive with stormwater projects like Perth's Sheepwash Creek flood mitigation (an ongoing multi-stage project) which improves resilience of the system.
 - Buildings. 63% remaining. This is a bit lower but still above the recommended benchmark of 60%. The drop from ~70% to 63% in one year likely results from revaluation capturing more realistic remaining lives for older buildings. It still means nearly two-thirds of collective building life is left. Notably, Council's major building stock includes things like halls, offices, sports facilities, some of which have had upgrades (e.g., pool amenities, hall improvements) extending their utility.
 - These ratios being > 60% across the board suggests assets are not critically worn out. The report explicitly notes that for Roads/Bridges and Stormwater, being above 60% for four years, it indicates an appropriate level of investment in renewal". In other words, Council's renewal efforts have been sufficient to maintain asset condition.

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- **Renewal vs. New Investment.** Council's capital works mix in 2024/25 was approximately 58% renewal, 42% new/upgrade by expenditure. This mix can vary year to year (2023/24 was 78% renewal, while 2022/23 was much lower). Over the long term, a healthy balance ensures that existing assets are kept serviceable while also providing new infrastructure for growth. The data suggests Council has a lot of new assets added in recent years (partly through subdivisions and grant-funded projects). This is beneficial but also adds to future maintenance load. The current spending on renewals (close to depreciation) indicates Council is keeping pace with wear-and-tear, not deferring maintenance extensively.
- **Specific Programs.** The report details many asset-related initiatives:
 - Roads. Ongoing local road rehab program, e.g., reconstruction of sections of road at Ross (Ashby Road) to address failing pavement. The report lists numerous road projects and their costs in the Works & Engineering section, showing active management of road conditions (from gravel road sealing to intersection upgrades). It also mentions membership in the Northern Tasmanian regional road groups and advocacy for continued Roads to Recovery funding, which is critical for road asset funding.
 - Bridges. Bridge renewal is included (e.g., Rossarden Bridge replacement \$310k was completed). Council has 183 bridges (per asset data) and has a rolling renewal program (the ratio indicates bridges are similarly well-maintained). They even adopted a policy in June 2025 regarding heavy vehicle use on bridges, signalling proactive risk management.
 - Stormwater. Council completed flood mitigation works (e.g., West Perth flood levee stage, and planning road/rail culverts for next stage). It also installed new stormwater infrastructure in growth areas (the report notes new subdivisions contributed 3.2 km of new roads and presumably drains). These efforts reduce future flooding risk and maintain stormwater service levels.
 - Buildings & Parks. Council invested in community building upgrades like the Campbell Town War Memorial Oval playground and Perth Recreation Ground facilities, as well as amenities like new toilets (e.g., Evandale toilet block upgrade) and the extension of Ross Community Sports Complex (Men's Shed expansion). The "Reserves and Public Open Space" objective lists that Council maintains over 100 parks/reserves and even added a new junior soccer field at Perth in 2024/25. This indicates Council is not just maintaining but enhancing recreation assets.
 - The report also notes Council maintains cemeteries in several towns (an often-overlooked asset class) and that it partners for things like supply of memorial plaques, suggesting even niche assets are managed with service agreements.

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- **Asset Management Plans and LTFP Integration.** Council's high Asset Renewal Funding Ratios (105–164%) show that its Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) allocations exceed the identified needs in the Strategic Asset Management Plans. In practice, this means Council has financially planned to replace/renew assets as needed (and then some). The commentary says all reported classes exceeded the 90-100% benchmark, indicating strong capacity to fund asset requirements. This alignment (or rather surplus) of funding suggests that, assuming the plans are accurate, Council will be able to maintain asset service levels into the future. There may even be room to reallocate some capital funds if they are consistently well above required (ensuring not to gold-plate assets unnecessarily).
- **Maintenance and Operations.** While the report doesn't provide specific maintenance expenditure data, it implies routine maintenance is being conducted (for example, mention of a "Parks & Reserves maintenance program, Ongoing" and road maintenance gravel contracts). Also, the user requests/complaints chart shows categories like "Works" and "Animal Control", presumably maintenance issues reported, which gives a sense that such issues are tracked and addressed (1,224 customer requests in total).
- **Risk Management related to Assets.** Council has considered climate and disaster risks for assets. It participated in the Climate Resilient Councils alliance and is integrating climate risk into infrastructure planning. It secured a Disaster Ready Fund grant to improve West Perth's flood infrastructure, a direct asset resilience project. Additionally, the report notes insurance coverage is maintained for significant risks. An Audit Panel met to review financial and risk management, likely including asset risk (no major issues flagged).

In summary, asset management health is robust.

- Physical indicators (condition ratios) are above benchmarks, showing assets are not being run down.
- Financial indicators (renewal spending and funding ratios) demonstrate commitment to timely asset renewal.
- Council is actively investing in both maintaining and upgrading infrastructure, balancing the needs of ageing assets with demands of growth and modern standards.
- No glaring asset class is underperforming; even traditionally troublesome areas like bridges and stormwater appear well-attended.

The only caution is to maintain this effort considering the underlying financial deficit, i.e., ensure that required renewal funding remains available in future budgets. If operating deficits persist, pressure could mount to defer capital renewals to save cash, which would start to erode asset condition. At present, though,

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Northern Midlands' assets are in good shape, and the Council's management practices (planning, funding, project delivery) support continued community benefit from those assets.

Rates and Revenue Sustainability

The Annual Report sheds light on Council's revenue mix and the sustainability of its funding model:

- **Rates as Primary Revenue.** Rates and charges are by far Council's biggest income source, accounting for **61% of total recurrent revenue in 2024/25**. In dollar terms, rates revenue was about \$14.7 million (since 61% of \$24.1m). This is typical for Tasmanian councils and indicates Council relies on the rate base for the majority of operating costs. **The report doesn't explicitly mention the rate increase applied in 2024/25**, but given CPI and local government cost index, one might infer rates were raised by a few percent. The key point is ratepayer contributions cover only about 3/5 of Council's expenses, with the rest coming from other sources.
- **Rate Base Characteristics.** Northern Midlands has a small population (14.4k residents) spread over a large area. The report notes this as a challenge: "a comparatively small number of ratepayers" must support services over a large, partly rural area. This means the taxable assessed annual value or capital value base is limited (a large portion of land may be rural with lower rate contributions relative to urban properties). Indeed, approximately 60% of the population lives in the northern 5% of the area (Longford, Perth, Evandale), implying vast rural regions with sparse population, yet roads and infrastructure still need maintenance there. This geographic reality can strain sustainability: Council must maintain extensive infrastructure (960 km roads, highest in state) while drawing rates from a modest population/economy.
- **Growth and Rates.** On the positive side, Northern Midlands is experiencing growth (population up 1% vs state 0.3%). New subdivisions in places like Perth and Longford are adding rateable properties. For instance, Council approved 94 new dwellings in 2024/25. These will expand the rate base over time. However, growth also demands new infrastructure (roads, parks) which Council then must service. The net benefit depends on development density and value, likely positive in Perth/Longford's case, but not a panacea for the deficit.
- **Grant Income. Government grants made up 21% of operating revenue** (roughly \$5.1m). This includes the Federal Assistance Grant (FAG) (which may be around \$3-4m, partly prepaid usually) and other specific operating grants (e.g. for childcare, roads maintenance). The report's "Future Funding" discussion shows Council actively pursues grants and also voices concern about cost-shifting: "Council continues to object to reallocation of responsibilities to local government from State/Feds without commensurate funding". This indicates Council is wary of having to do more with the same rates. The sustainability of relying on grants is moderate, the FAG is relatively stable but indexed lowly, and other grants can fluctuate or cease. Council's strategy has been to seize grants for capital works (which is smart), but for operating needs (e.g. childcare subsidies, road maintenance) it cannot count on large increases. A risk is if external grant funding (like roads money or public health funding) stagnates or declines, **Council might face a revenue shortfall unless rates make up difference**.

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- **User Fees and Other Revenue.** The remaining ~18% of revenue includes fees, charges, and investment income. The report doesn't break this out in narrative, but from financials: User fees were \$3.55m, interest income ~\$0.94m, other income ~\$0.56m. User fees cover things like waste charges, planning/building fees, pool entry, childcare fees, etc. These generally recovered costs but likely not profit centres. For instance, waste management is often near break-even after state levies. Interest earnings jumped in FY24 due to interest rate rises on deposits, but FY25 saw a weird drop in interest on rates (perhaps Council waived penalties or had fewer arrears). Overall, these sources are not growing dramatically; they move with activity levels and economic conditions.
- **Rate Increases vs CPI.** The report doesn't explicitly state the % rate increase for 2024/25, which is a vital context for sustainability. However, given the underlying deficit, it suggests that prior rate increases and growth were insufficient to cover cost growth. If Council has been keeping rate rises low (perhaps to reduce burden on residents), that could have contributed to the deficit. In future, higher rate rises or expansion of the rate base may be needed. The community's ability to pay is a factor (Northern Midlands has **pockets of disadvantage but also growing commuter towns**). The Strategic Plan goal likely balances "affordable rates" with financial sustainability.
- **Rates per Capita/Property.** A quick inferred calc: \$14.7m rates over ~8,500 rateable properties (assuming population ~14.4k corresponds to maybe 6k households + 2k farms/commercial) gives perhaps ~\$1,700 per property on average. This is moderate. There might be room to increase rates a bit above inflation, especially if justified by service improvements. The question is political acceptability and community benefit.
- **Efficiencies and Other Revenues.** The report doesn't mention any plans for significant new revenue streams (like commercial activities or developer contributions beyond current practice). It does mention Council receives fees for things like a kerbside recycling contract share and participates in resource-sharing arrangements (e.g., Northern Tasmania Development Corp), but **no substantial alternative revenue**. Therefore, rates will remain the mainstay. On cost side, Council likely will continue seeking efficiencies, e.g., the sharing of plant and joint tenders (some regional contracts listed in tenders section) help reduce costs.
- **Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP).** Though not in detail in the report, the extremely high Asset Renewal Funding Ratio for some classes suggests the LTFP might project significant future rate rises or capital revenue to fund those outlays. If the LTFP is realistic, it likely assumes steady rate increases (perhaps ~3-4% annually). The community should be aware that to maintain assets and eliminate the deficit, rates may need to rise in real terms. The report's omission of LTFP assumptions is a gap, it doesn't clearly convey the forward strategy for revenue. However, it implies Council "believes it is sustainable in the long term" despite recent deficits, which might indicate planned future adjustments.

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Sustainability Outlook. At the moment, Northern Midlands' revenue mix is adequate but tight. The sustainability of services is at risk if current trends continue:

- If costs keep rising ~5% and rates only ~3%, the gap widens.
- The Council cannot easily reduce core costs (roads must be maintained, waste collected, etc.) without service cuts.
- Therefore, either rates must increase at a slightly higher rate, or new revenue sources (like growth or higher grants) must fill the gap, or some services rationalised.

The community should note that Council's prudent financial management (no debt, good assets) gives it options. It could run a few deficits by using cash reserves, but that's not infinite. So a conversation about rates vs services is likely on the horizon. Indeed, one of the Top 10 Questions later in the submission asks how Council plans to address this structural issue.

In summary, **rate and revenue sustainability is borderline**. Council is not in crisis, it has enough revenue to operate day-to-day and maintain infrastructure now, thanks partly to grants. But the underlying imbalance signals that **the current revenue policy is not fully sustainable** in the long run. To ensure future generations enjoy the same or better services, Council will either need to grow its rate base (through development), increase rates and charges moderately above inflation, and/or find efficiency savings. Engaging the community on these choices will be crucial, as will continued advocacy for fair funding from other levels of government (especially given Northern Midlands' regional infrastructure supporting agriculture, tourism and industry beyond its population). The Annual Report has set the stage by transparently showing where money comes from and goes; the next steps involve policy decisions to strengthen that picture.

Audit Findings, Risk Management, and Governance Effectiveness

Audit Findings. The independent audit of Council's 2024/25 financial statements (performed by the Tasmanian Audit Office) resulted in an **unqualified (clean) audit opinion**. Although the Auditor's Report text is not fully reproduced in searchable form, there is no indication of any qualification or emphasis of matter in the Annual Report. The Acting General Manager's certification confirms compliance with Australian Accounting Standards and the Local Government Act, and asserts the financial statements present Council's financial position fairly. The audit opinion, as required by law, is included and would have stated that in the auditors' opinion the financial report "presents fairly" the financial results for the year. No references to fraud, legislative non-compliance, or material misstatements are noted, implying a clean bill of financial health from the auditors.

The Council's **Audit Committee** met during the year and provided input into Council operations. This committee, which includes independent members, is a good governance practice and suggests that financial reports, internal controls, and risk frameworks were reviewed. The report does not elaborate on any specific Audit Panel findings, which typically means there were no significant issues to report to the public (any major issues would likely be mentioned in the Annual Report or at least in the Audit Panel's annual report to Council).

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Risk Management: The Annual Report devotes attention to Council's approach to risk:

- Council is "committed to embedding enterprise risk management" in its culture. It has a **Risk Management Policy** that underpins this, requiring all employees to manage risk in their areas. This indicates a formal framework is in place.
- A review of Council's comprehensive **Risk Register** was conducted, incorporating strategic, operational, and emergency management risks. The fact that this is mentioned (with actions like training and safe operating procedures updates) shows active risk management processes. For example, Council updated Safe Work Method Statements and conducted Aquatic Centre safety audits, which increased workloads but presumably improved safety.
- **Insurance.** Council holds appropriate insurance covers for identified significant risks. It notes that it manages interest rate risk and credit risk per policies, which ties into financial risk management in the notes. Council also collects a State Fire Service levy via rates (passed on to the State) as part of risk mitigation for the community.
- **Emergency Management.** The report's strategic issues section references climate change and emergency preparedness. Council is part of the Northern Tasmania Regional Emergency Management group (NTARC) and has begun including climate risk assessments for member councils. It also engaged with the State Emergency Service for flood modelling in levee-protected areas of Longford. These actions reflect forward-looking risk planning for natural disasters.

Overall, these points reflect a **proactive risk management culture**. There were no major adverse events reported (no mention of, say, significant litigation, infrastructure failure, or WHS incidents causing severe injury or financial loss). If any significant contingent liabilities, accounting standards would require disclosure; none are apparent in the notes excerpted (aside from routine ones).

I note the failure to report on the legal matter relating to the repayment of Council funds for legal expenses of a personal defamation which was handed down in November 2024. The Annual Report does not disclose the amount recovered or any outstanding expenditure by council that was not accounted for by the judgement in the Supreme Court of Tasmania.

Related Party Disclosures. In Note 10.1, Council lists its **Responsible Persons** (Councillors and senior executives) and disclosures related to them. The Annual Report excerpt mentions a remuneration schedule for councillors and likely senior staff, which is provided (Councillor allowances saw, senior staff bands in Note 10.1). Any material related party transactions (for example, if Council did business with a company a Councillor owns) would be disclosed here. The report does not call out any unusual, related party transactions, implying none of significance occurred beyond normal reimbursement of expenses and payments of allowances. That suggests there were **no conflicts of interest resulting in Council contracting with related entities** in a material way, or if so, they were immaterial and handled with proper transparency. This points to sound governance in procurement.

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Code of Conduct and Governance. One area of concern is the number of Code of Conduct complaints received and the failure to comment on the Independent Review of Governance. Nine complaints in one year is relatively high for a council of this size. The report confirms one complaint was upheld by the Code of Conduct Panel. While the details are not given (due to confidentiality), an upheld complaint means a councillor was found to have breached the Code and presumably sanctioned. The other eight were dismissed or not upheld. This level of complaints could indicate interpersonal conflicts or political friction within Council. It's a **governance red flag** in terms of Council dynamics. The community may worry that such infighting detracts from focusing on community issues. The fact that Council had a Code of Conduct policy in place as required is good, but the volume suggests that more training or mediation might be needed to improve teamwork among elected members.

Council did not publish the **cost associated** with these Code complaints (as noted earlier under compliance). Those costs (legal advice, panel fees) can add up and ultimately are borne by ratepayers, so it is a governance transparency issue. The omission is likely inadvertent, but Council should include it next time and, more importantly, work to minimise such complaints. Potential actions include refresher training on the Code for councillors (the Local Government Act now mandates councillor training, and the report indeed lists "Online learning modules completed by Councillors" on pages 15–18).

Governance omissions in the report. Several significant events have not been mentioned in the Annual Report which have impacted on the governance of the Council. These include the handing down by the Supreme Court of Tasmania in November 2024, findings that the Council illegally provided financial assistance to the Mayor and General Manager to action defamation action. In judgement by Marshall AJ, he stated that *"The second respondent, as a Mayor of a council, and the third respondent (the General Manager), as an employee of high standing in a local government authority, should have known better. They should have understood that payment out of council funds for private purposes of councillors and council staff, is illegal and arguably corrupt conduct"*

The Annual Report makes no reference to whether funds have been repaid to Council and whether Council has failed to recover any funds because of this case.

It is further noted that no mention was raised in the Annual Report of the Independent Review into the Governance of the Council. Whether this was deliberate or accidental it was a significant activity which was omitted. It is unclear whether all the actions and recommendations in the report have been completed or what the outstanding items are.

Councillor Attendance and Training. The report shows an 88.9% attendance rate at Council meetings on average. This is a decent indicator of Councillor engagement (almost 9 out of 10 meetings attended on average). The breakdown on page 15 likely shows if any Councillor had significantly low attendance, if so, it would be apparent. High attendance generally means Council can make decisions effectively (quorum achieved, voices heard).

The report also details compliance with the new requirement for councillor professional development (online modules). The report on the online training shows that only one councillor has completed 100% of the training, three completing two-thirds of the modules and five Councillors failing to undertake any. The report fails to highlight the lack of training by five Councillors as is required by regulation 37 (d) of the Local Government (General) Regulation.

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The lack of training by councillors is reflected in the attendance at conferences, seminars and online training, which is undertaken. Here one councillor dominates, whilst many relate to meetings (not educational training and development) it is surprising the lack of other councillors being given the opportunity to attend seminars. Five Councillors did not attend any seminars, conferences or online training sessions.

Conclusion on Governance Effectiveness. The Annual Report itself is thorough, indicating that management and Councillors take accountability reporting seriously. To further enhance governance, Council might address the causes of Code of Conduct complaints (perhaps via a facilitated workshop on roles and respect, etc.) and ensure future reports fully meet all disclosure requirements and contain no contradictory statements. **Continuous training and a culture of respect** will help reduce governance distractions.

It is important that the Annual Report reflects all the key governance issues that occur in that year the omission of the findings of the Supreme Court of Tasmania and the Independent Advisor report is poor in reflection transparency and accountability.

Summary of concerns and issues to be addressed

These matters are presented in the interest of Northern Midlands residents and ratepayers. Its purpose is to constructively review Council's Annual Report 2024/25, highlighting achievements and raising questions about areas of concern. By doing so, it seeks to promote transparency, accountability, and the long-term wellbeing of our community. The Annual Report is our community's window into Council's operations; they aim to ensure that window is clear and that Council is addressing the issues that matter for our shared future.

I acknowledge Council's positive work over the past year as detailed in the Annual Report, and I also outline some concerns and opportunities for improvement. I request that Council consider this feedback and provide responses to the questions posed, in the spirit of community engagement and good governance.

Despite the many positives, the Annual Report also reveals certain concerns that warrant Council's attention. I group these into finance, assets, services, and governance:

- **Financial Sustainability (Operating Deficit).** The most significant concern is the operating deficit in Council's budget. In 2024/25, Council's underlying operating expenses exceeded its revenue by about **\$2.6 million**. This is a structural shortfall (roughly 10% of recurrent income) that was covered only thanks to large one-off grants and prior savings. If this deficit persists or widens, it could **erode Council's cash reserves** and put pressure on future rate levels or service levels. In short, the current revenue streams (primarily rates) are not keeping pace with expenditure on core services and asset depreciation. This concern affects every ratepayer: it raises the question of whether Council can continue to provide the same services and maintain assets in the long run without either raising more revenue or cutting costs. I urge Council to develop and articulate a plan for returning to an operating surplus, to ensure financial resilience.

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- **Reliance on External Funding.** Related to the above, Council is **highly reliant on external grants** for both operating projects and especially capital works. In 2024/25, 21% of operating revenue came from government grants. More strikingly, nearly all major capital projects were funded by state/federal grants (totalling ~\$14.4m). While I applaud Council's success in attracting grants, this situation poses a risk to revenue stability. Grant programs can change with political winds, for example, federal infrastructure funding might be reduced post-2026. If such funding were to diminish, Council might find it difficult to fund necessary infrastructure renewals or community programs at current levels without significant adjustments. The concern for residents is that essential works could be delayed, or local rates might have to bear a larger load if outside funding falls. I encourage Council to lobby for continued grant support while also building contingencies (e.g., reserve funds) and exploring ways to broaden the rate base (through sensible development) to reduce vulnerability.
- **Deferred Capital Works & Project Delivery.** The Annual Report lists several **capital projects that were deferred or carried into next year**. For example, certain street upgrades in Campbell Town and Perth did not commence as scheduled. This raises concern about **project delivery capacity**. Are there bottlenecks (e.g., contractor shortages, internal resourcing, approvals) that Council can address to ensure critical infrastructure projects happen on time? Delays can frustrate communities expecting improvements and can also lead to cost escalations. For residents, a deferred road or stormwater upgrade might mean continued inconvenience or risk (e.g., flooding risk in a delayed drainage project). I urge Council to identify the causes of these deferrals and communicate revised timelines to affected communities. Maintaining transparency and steady progress on promised works is key to public confidence.
- **Staffing Costs and Service Efficiency.** The Report shows a notable increase in employee costs (approximately 14% higher than the prior year). Council has increased its workforce to deliver more services (for instance, staffing the new childcare centre, additional compliance staff for new regulations, etc.). While investing in staff is important for quality services, rising employee expenditure in the face of an operating deficit is a **red flag**. The increase in employee costs has meant that this has **grown from \$7 million or 29.3% of expenditure in 2022/23 to \$9.6 million or 35.9% of expenditure in 2025/26**.

The concern is whether Council is getting corresponding efficiency gains and service improvements for these higher costs. Ratepayers ultimately fund wages; they need assurance that staffing is optimised, productivity is high, and service outputs justify the costs. I suggest Council review its workforce plan for opportunities to **improve productivity or share resources regionally** and clearly communicate to the public how these staffing increases benefit the community (e.g., reduced processing times, extended service hours, etc.). **Keeping employee costs sustainable is crucial to avoid sudden rate hikes or cutbacks later.**

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- Asset Renewal vs New Assets.** Council has been very active in building new or upgraded facilities (new parks, expanded buildings, extensions, etc.), which the community enjoys. However, the Report hints that some asset renewals have been slightly below ideal levels in recent years (e.g., only 41% of depreciation spent on renewals in 2022/23, due to focus on upgrades). The long-term concern is to ensure that the emphasis on new projects does not come at the expense of adequately renewing existing infrastructure. If an asset (say a section of road or an older building) is due for renewal and funds are diverted to a flashy new project instead, it could lead to higher maintenance costs or failure down the line. I note that Council's overall renewal performance has improved (back near 100% in 2023/24), but this balance should be continuously monitored. The community values new amenities, but not at the cost of existing assets deteriorating. I encourage Council to maintain a rigorous asset management schedule and to resist political pressure to build "new things" if it would cannibalise funds needed for core maintenance. An evidence-based approach using asset condition data should guide the capital works program.
- Community Service Levels and KPIs.** While Council provides many services, it is hard to gauge **how well services are meeting community needs** because the Annual Report doesn't include much in the way of outcome-based performance indicators (e.g., community satisfaction ratings, response time targets, etc.). For instance, I see the number of customer requests, but do we know what percentage were resolved on time or to satisfaction? Similarly, usage statistics for facilities (library visits, pool attendance) are not reported, this data could highlight successes or under-utilisation. The concern here is **transparency and continuous improvement: without clear KPIs**, the community cannot tell if Council is hitting its service benchmarks or where improvement efforts are focused. I ask Council to consider introducing more **measurable service targets** and to report on them (even if informally via website or newsletters). This helps ensure that as ratepayers, we know we're getting value for money and that any service issues are being tracked and addressed.
- Governance and Conduct.** The number of Code of Conduct complaints (nine) lodged against Councillors in 2024/25 is concerning. While only one was upheld, the volume suggests significant interpersonal or governance challenges. Such disputes can consume resources (time, legal costs) and harm Council's reputation. They also indicate potential divisions that might hinder effective decision-making on behalf of the community. I am concerned about the cost (financial and reputational) of these complaints, and the fact that the Annual Report did not disclose the total expense incurred (which, though not huge in the scheme of the budget, is a matter of principle and required by legislation).

The Independent Review of Governance and Meeting Procedures report states:

By far, the most concerning matter identified from this review is in regard to relationship breakdown between respective parties.

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In recommendation 16 of the report, it recommends *that the Mayor, Councillors and the General Manager should actively and genuinely participate in a dedicated mediation process, delivered by an experienced mediation professional, that focusses on improving working relationships to improve Council governance.*

It appears that this has not occurred. It is the mayor's function under section 27 (c) of the Local Government Act 1993 to promote good governance by, and within, the council. This places an obligation on the mayor to improve relationships within Council for the good of the wider community.

I urge Council to address the underlying issues, whether it be via better training in meeting procedures, conflict resolution workshops, or a recommitment to the Councillor Code of Conduct, so that our elected members can work together more constructively. Good governance requires not just compliance on paper but a culture of respect and collaboration. I hope to see fewer (ideally zero) code complaints in the next year. Additionally, I expect Council to fully disclose any associated costs in future reports for transparency.

Recommended Actions

Based on the review of the Annual Report and the concerns outlined, I respectfully make the following recommendations for Council's consideration:

1. **Develop a Financial Sustainability Plan.** Formulate a clear action plan (and share it with the public) to restore an underlying surplus by a target year (e.g. within the next 2–3 budgets). This should include examining opportunities for revenue enhancement (balanced against ratepayer impact) and efficiency gains. Essentially, set a roadmap for closing the \$2.6m gap in a responsible manner, and track progress annually.
2. **Enhance Transparency in Future Reports.** Commit to full disclosure of all required information in Annual Reports, notably, the cost of Code of Conduct complaints (even if zero or modest) and any other omissions identified this year. Additionally, improve the clarity of performance evaluation by including measurable targets vs outcomes. For example, if the Annual Plan sets a goal, next year report "Achieved" or percentage complete. This will make it easier for the community to hold Council accountable in a constructive way.
3. **Address Councillor Conduct Proactively.** Invest in governance training and mediation for Councillors as a group. Consider engaging an independent facilitator if needed to help resolve ongoing interpersonal issues. Update the Councillor Code of Conduct if any gaps are identified in expected behaviours. The goal is to foster a more collegial environment, thereby reducing Code of Conduct incidents and focusing energy on community issues. Fewer distractions at the Council table will improve decision-making and public confidence.

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4. **Maintain Asset Renewal Priority.** Ensure that asset management plans are rigorously followed. I recommend ring-fencing funds for critical asset renewals (roads, bridges, drainage, plant) each year before allocating budget to discretionary new projects. If new grants come in, consider using a portion to top up asset renewal reserves. By keeping the asset sustainability ratio around 100% or above, Council will prevent the hidden infrastructure backlog that has troubled some other councils. Publicly report any instance where you decide to defer a scheduled renewal and explain the rationale.
5. **Communicate on Deferred Projects.** For projects that have been delayed (deferred capital works, etc.), improve communications with the affected communities. For example, provide updates via Council's website or district committee meetings on when those projects will happen and why they were delayed. This transparency manages expectations and maintains trust that "deferred" does not mean "cancelled". It also honours the input residents gave during planning consultations for those projects.
6. **Explore Revenue Diversification.** I encourage Council to explore ways to slightly diversify income, so ratepayers aren't the sole source of extra funds. This could include reviewing fees and charges for services to ensure they reflect the cost of provision (while still being fair), seeking sponsorships or partnerships for community events/facilities, and advocating for fairer shares of state funding (especially given our large road network). Even minor diversification can relieve rate pressure. Any new revenue ideas should be transparently discussed with the community.
7. **Engage Community on Service Levels.** Consider conducting a community survey or consultation to determine if there are areas where service levels could be adjusted (either trimmed or enhanced) in line with resident priorities. For instance, if 90% of residents are satisfied with current services, that's great, but if there are services people value less, Council could redirect resources. Conversely, if there's willingness to pay a bit more for certain improved services, that feedback is useful. An informed conversation about the cost-value of services would help Council make budget decisions that reflect community preferences, rather than guessing in a vacuum.
8. **Report on Long-Term Plans.** Provide a summary of Council's Long Term Financial Plan and Strategic Asset Management Plan in plain language for the public. Highlight projections of major capital needs, debt (if any planned), rate forecasts, and how Council will manage emerging issues (like growth in Perth, climate resilience investments, etc.). This educative step will help residents understand why, for example, rates might need to rise or why certain projects are prioritised. It can be included as a section in future annual reports or as a stand-alone "Council financial outlook" publication.

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Financial Position Summary. In layman's terms, **Northern Midlands Council is in a stable financial position today but faces a challenge for tomorrow.** The books balance on a cash basis and reserves are healthy, largely due to external funding and prudent past management. However, the **current rates and revenue settings are not covering all ongoing costs**, effectively dipping into windfalls to subsidise operations. The key risk is that if nothing changes, the Council could slowly burn through its cash or be forced into sharp rate hikes or service cuts down the line. The good news is that Council has no debt and has time to correct course. By planning, leveraging economic growth, and tightening financial management, Council should be able to steer back to an operating surplus without drastic measures.

Conclusion

In closing, I acknowledge the Council's achievements in 2024/25 and the comprehensive effort that went into reporting them. The recommendations and questions posed in this submission are offered in a spirit of collaboration, my aim is to ensure the Northern Midlands remains a place of proud heritage, quality services, and sustainable growth. By addressing the concerns raised and implementing the suggested improvements, Council will strengthen its financial footing and governance, which ultimately benefits all of us who live, work, and invest in the Northern Midlands.

I look forward to Council's response to this submission and to an ongoing constructive dialogue between Council and the community. Together, let's keep Northern Midlands financially sound, well-governed, and moving from strength to strength.

Questions on Notice to the Annual General Meeting

To foster an open dialogue, I pose the following questions to Council. I respectfully request that Council address these questions at the Annual General Meeting or in a subsequent public forum, providing page references or context from the Annual Report where applicable:

1. INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO GOVERNANCE

In 2024/25 the report by the Independent Advisor was released, with 30 Recommendations. The last report to Council in May 2025 advised that only 6 recommendations have been marked as completed. In the Mayor's media release, it stated that *it is expected that the implementation of the recommendations arising from the review will occur over an extended period of time.*

- a. What is the timeline for the implementation of the remaining 24 recommendations?*
- b. Why was the Review not included in the Annual Report?*

2. SUPREME COURT FINDINGS REPAYMENT OF LEGAL AND OTHER COSTS

- a. What was the total expenditure by council since the action commenced?*
- b. What was the amount of the monies repaid?*
- c. How much of Council's costs were not recovered from this legal action?*
- d. Why was this excluded from the Annual Report?*

3. OPERATING DEFICIT RECOVERY

- a. What specific actions will Council take in the next budget/s to eliminate the \$2.6 million underlying operating deficit reported for 2024/25?*
- b. Is Council considering revenue measures (rate increases above CPI or new fees) or cost-saving measures to close this gap and ensure Council's finances are sustainable long-term?*

4. RATE STRATEGY AND AFFORDABILITY

- a. Given that 61% of Council's income comes from rates paid by a relatively small base of ratepayers, how does Council plan to manage rate increases moving forward?*
- b. Specifically, will Council commit to keeping rate rises gradual and predictable, and/or can it broaden the rate base through encouraging growth in a way that doesn't compromise our rural character?*
- c. Essentially, how will you balance the need for more revenue with ratepayer affordability?*

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5. CONTINGENCY FOR GRANT REDUCTIONS

Council benefited from unusually high grant funding (21% of operating revenue, and over \$14m in capital grants) this year.

- a. *If state or federal grant programs (like the Local Roads & Community Infrastructure fund) are scaled back in future years, what is Council's contingency plan to fund important capital works or services?*
- b. *Would projects be postponed, or would Council consider borrowing or reallocating funds to compensate?*
- c. *How is Council preparing for a scenario of reduced external funding?*

6. DEFERRED PROJECTS TIMELINE

Several capital works were listed as "Deferred" or "Ongoing" at 30 June 2025 (e.g., certain Perth road upgrades, Campbell Town streetscape stages).

- a. *Can Council explain the reasons for these deferrals (lack of contractors, design issues, etc.) and provide an updated timeline for when each of these deferred projects will be completed?*
- b. *How will Council ensure that these projects, many of which communities have been eagerly awaiting, are delivered on the revised schedule?*

7. STAFFING AND EFFICIENCY

Council's employee costs rose significantly (from ~\$8.46m to \$9.65m) in 2024/25.

- a. *What is Council's strategy to ensure staffing levels and costs are sustainable and delivering value?*
- b. *For instance, have these additional staff resources led to measurable improvements in service delivery (such as faster permit approvals or extended service hours at facilities)?*
- c. *If so, please provide examples. If not, what steps are being taken to improve operational efficiency?*

8. CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINT COSTS

What was the total cost to Council of the Code of Conduct complaints handled in 2024/25 (including Panel fees, legal advice, etc).

- a. *Why was this figure not disclosed in the Annual Report?*
- b. *Moving forward, will Council commit to publishing this information in compliance with Section 72 requirements?*
- c. *What steps is Council taking to reduce the incidence of such complaints (e.g., mediation processes, training for Councillors on conduct)?*

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9. COUNCILLOR TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

Councillor training modules were completed by only 4 Councillors. Professional development of Councillors is important in improving governance.

- a. Will Council develop a Councillor training and development program?***
- b. What steps have been taken to increase Councillors' understanding of the Code of Conduct and understanding of meeting procedures?***

10. COUNCILLOR GOVERNANCE IMPROVEMENT

I request clarification because effective governance is crucial for focusing on community outcomes rather than internal disputes.

- a. Following on the above, how does Council plan to rebuild public trust and internal cohesion after a year with nine Code of Conduct complaints?***
- b. Are there any governance initiatives (perhaps through the Local Government Association or Office of Local Government) that Council is undertaking to improve teamwork and decision-making processes among Councillors?***

11. SERVICE PERFORMANCE METRICS

Metrics like customer request resolution times, community satisfaction survey results, library/pool usage statistics, etc. could help the community gauge how well Council services are performing. Does Council have any current internal targets for such metrics

- a. Will Council consider developing and reporting key performance indicators for service delivery in future Annual Reports or updates that can be shared publicly?***
- b. How does the community know it is receiving a high standard of service for the rates they pay?***

12. ASSET RENEWAL FUNDING

The Annual Report shows Council plans to fund 100%+ of required asset renewals in its Long-Term Financial Plan. I seek assurance that maintenance of what does the community have to be sacrificed for new capital works.

- a. Can Council confirm that it is fully committed to maintaining existing assets in coming years, even as it pursues new projects?***
- b. For instance, if faced with budget pressures, will Council prioritise critical renewals (roads, stormwater, plant replacement) to avoid accumulating an infrastructure backlog?***

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13. LONG TERM FINANCIAL PLAN (LTFP) TRANSPARENCY

- a. *Will Council publish or share highlights of its updated Long Term Financial Plan so the community can understand the financial trajectory and assumptions (e.g., assumed rate increases, growth forecasts, major projects planned) that underpin statements like “Council believes it is sustainable in the long term”?***
- b. *Having more insight into the 5–10 year outlook would help the community provide input and brace for any required adjustments. In particular, how and when does the LTFP project a return to an underlying surplus, and what are the key variables (rate revenue growth, operating cost control, etc.) involved?***

14. UNDERLYING DEFICIT DRIVERS

The underlying deficit worsened from –\$0.76m to –\$2.60m in one year.

- a. *What were the top 3 drivers of this deterioration (e.g., specific cost increases or revenue shortfalls), and which of those are expected to persist into 2025/26?***

15. OPERATING COST CONTAINMENT PLAN

Employee costs rose materially (approx. +\$1.2m over 3 years) while Council is running an operating deficit.

- a. *What concrete cost- containment measures (if any) are being implemented in 2025/26, and what savings target is set?***

16. INTEREST AND ARREARS CHANGE

Interest on rates fell sharply year-on-year (from ~\$416k to ~\$88k).

- a. *What caused this drop (reduced arrears, policy change, waived penalties?), and what is Council’s expected rates arrears level going forward?***

17. CASH BUFFER ADEQUACY

Council holds ~\$17m in cash/investments with no debt.

- a. *What is Council’s target minimum unrestricted cash reserve (in months of operating spend), and how close is council to that floor given ongoing deficits?***

18. DEBT STRATEGY CLARITY

Council is debt-free.

- a. *Does Council have a formal debt policy or borrowing threshold for future intergenerational assets, and under what circumstances would borrowing be preferred over rate increases or deferring projects?***

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19. GRANT REVENUE RECOGNITION VS DELIVERY RISK

Capital grants received exceeded capital works delivered.

- a. How much of the unspent grant funding is quarantined for specific projects, and what is the risk of clawback or deadline breach?*

20. DEFERRED WORKS AND INFLATION EXPOSURE

Several projects were deferred or carried forward

- a. What is the estimated cost escalation exposure from deferrals (construction inflation), and how is that being budgeted for?*

21. RENEWAL GAP EARLY-WARNING

Renewal spend was slightly below depreciation this year (97%).

- a. Which asset classes (roads/bridges, buildings, stormwater) have the highest renewal backlog risk over the next 3–5 years, and what is the quantified backlog value?*

22. BUILDING PORTFOLIO RISK

Building condition ratio fell to ~63% remaining life.

- a. Which specific buildings are in the lowest condition bands, what are the renewal/upgrade plans and costs, and are any service risks emerging?*

23. ROAD NETWORK SUSTAINABILITY BY SEGMENT

Council maintains ~970 km of roads.

- a. What proportion of the road network is currently rated “poor” or “very poor,” and how has that changed over the last 3 years?*

24. STORMWATER & FLOOD MITIGATION SEQUENCING

West Perth flood works are multi-stage with external funding.

- a. What are the remaining stages, their costs, and the funding certainty for each stage? What happens if the next stage funding isn’t secured?*

25. CUSTOMER REQUEST RESOLUTION PERFORMANCE:

Council logged 1,224 customer requests and improved counting methods.

- a. What % of requests were resolved within target timeframes, and does Council have resolution-time KPIs by service area?*

26. CHILDCARE SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY

Perth Early Learning Centre opened and expanded capacity.

- a. Is the childcare operation forecast to be break-even or subsidised over the next 3 years, and what utilisation rate is required to stay financially sustainable?*

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27. RECREATION UTILISATION

Council invested in new recreation assets.

- a. *What are current utilisation trends for key facilities (pools, sports centre), and how are those trends guiding future investment?***

28. WASTE / TRANSFER STATION COST RECOVERY

Council runs multiple waste facilities.

- a. *Are waste services fully cost-recovered through fees and levies? If not, what is the annual subsidy from general rates?***

29. INTEGRITY COMMISSION COMPLAINTS

Five Integrity Commission complaints were received; none investigated.

- a. *What were the themes of these complaints, and what governance improvements (if any) resulted from them?***

30. CONTRACT CONCENTRATION

Multiple high-value tenders/contracts were awarded.

- a. *What % of Council's total procurement spend goes to the top 5 suppliers, and what safeguards are in place to prevent over-reliance on a small set?***

31. COUNCILLOR TRAINING EFFECTIVENESS

Councillor training modules were completed while Code complaints remain high.

- a. *How is Council evaluating whether councillor training is improving conduct and governance outcomes, and what enhancements are planned?***

32. NARRATIVE/DATA CONSISTENCY CONTROLS

The report contains at least one narrative inconsistency with KPI data.

- a. *What internal review/QA process is used to verify that performance narratives accurately match the financial and KPI tables?***

33. GROWTH INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING PLAN

Perth and Longford are projected to grow strongly.

- a. *What is the long-term infrastructure funding plan to support growth (roads, stormwater, parks), and how much is expected from developer contributions vs rates/grants?***

34. STRATEGIC PLAN MEASURABLE TARGETS

Strategic initiatives (Economic Development, Health & Wellbeing, Youth) are progressing.

- a. *What measurable outcome targets (not just actions) are set for each strategy, and how will success be reported year-on-year?***

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35. CLIMATE RISK INTEGRATION INTO ASSET PLANNING

Council is doing regional climate risk work.

- a. Which high-risk climate hazards (flood, heat, bushfire) are expected to materially increase asset renewal or maintenance costs, and how are those costs built into the LTFP?***

36. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ROI

Council is supporting major economic initiatives like TransLink planning.

- a. What is the expected economic return for the municipality (jobs, rate base growth, freight uplift), and how will Council measure whether projects like TransLink deliver that return?***

37. NMBA RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The Council spends over \$100,000 with NMBA for economic development.

- a. Why are the NMBA activities in promoting Economic Development not listed in Council's achievements?***
- b. Has council undertaken an evaluation of the return on investment for the expenditure with NMBA in improving economic development?***

38. LIVE STREAMING OF COUNCIL MEETINGS

Council audio streams its meetings. Many councils in the state also video stream their meetings.

- a. When will Council commence live video streaming its council meetings?***

39. PHOTOS

Photos within the report and particularly the cover are poor selections as they are not truly reflective of the council's core business or achievements as per page 76 of the Annual Report. There are numerous photos throughout and these should not be focused on a one-day visit by the Governor. The use of the photos appears to be nothing more than a self-indulgent attempt by the mayor to promote herself. On page 20 there is a photo that appeared in the 2023/24 report (page 22) and appears to be irrelevant to this financial year. The photos of other councillors is limited.

- a. What is the mayor doing to show leadership and inclusiveness of all councillors?***

40. COMMUNICATION WITH COMMUNITY

On page 32 of the report I quote Communicate the latest information on projects, services, activities and issues to the community through a diverse range of channels including Council's website and Facebook page, Council's page in the fortnightly Northern Courier section of the Tasmanian Country newspaper and other media outlets – online and hard copy – as required.

- a. What steps are being taken to better communicate with residents who do not have ready access to IT?***

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41. BUDGET FOR PROJECTS

On page 38 of the report under the Integrated Priority Projects and Strategic Projects there are several projects on hold, yet it is understood that they are in the budgets for the 2025/26 years in which our rates have been calculated.

a. Will they be completed in this budget cycle? If not, why not?

42. SALE OF CAMPBELL TOWN "TOWN HALL"

On page 38 you report that the Campbell Town "Town Hall" sale or lease is on track. How can this be true as it has dragged on for years now and the building needs urgent repairs. In November 2024 Council moved a motion that should the building not be sold within 6 months council would reassess the sale again. The six months has now expired.

a. As the Town Hall has not been sold within 6 months, has the sale been reassessed as per the Council passed motion?

43. INTEGRATED PRIORITY PROJECTS AND STRATEGIC PROJECTS

On Page 56 of the report, there are no values or schedule in the table.

a. Will there be no funds allocated to these strategic projects?

44. MAIN STREET PROJECTS

On page 77 in the report under Key Achievements for 2025/2025 it is stated that Perth Main Street Upgrade \$1,221,000 and Campbell Town Main Street Upgrade \$386,000

a. How can this be an achievement with work to continue well into 2026? When will these be completed?

45. CAPITAL WORKS PROGRAM STATUS

On page 79 of the report, you cite top priorities for the 2025/26 year. On pages 80 through to 83 you cite many projects with a completed status.

a. Is this not misleading to include completed projects as priorities for the coming financial year when they are no longer requiring effort?

46. STRATEGIC PLANNING

Council currently has a Strategic Plan that expires in 2027.

a. What action is council taking to engage with the community for effective consultation to develop a new 10-year plan?

47. WORKERS COMPENSATION COSTS

On page 42 of the report Workers Compensation costs have risen from \$124,762 in 2022/23 to \$206,554 in 2024/25.

a. Has there been any incident that has caused the Councils Workers Compensation Costs to rise?

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48. STRATEGIC PLANNING - AGED AND DISABILITY PLANNING

Northern Midlands has a high proportion of retirees and pensioners. On page 34 of the report, it states that the Disability Action Plan and Plan have been completed. This is not correct. At the October 2025 council meeting, council was advised: The development of further strategies including a Domestic and Family Violence Strategy, Disability Inclusion Strategy, Positive Ageing Strategy and Reconciliation Strategy was flagged. To date these have not progressed past preliminary drafts due to staff resource limitations.

a. *When will these strategies be finalised so that they can be fully implemented.*

49. TASCAT COSTS

The report makes no reference to the costs of taking legal action with TASCAT or the Planning Commission.

a. *How many cases have been initiated by Council and others and how many have been won by council?*

b. *What is the total cost of this legal action to council?*

50. AVAILABILITY OF ANNUAL REPORT

In the OLG Annual Report Good Practice Guidelines, the guide suggests that copies of the report should be available by 1 November to provide the community with sufficient time to read the report before the council's annual general meeting. Given that the council released the document in the afternoon of 26 November and provided until 10am on 8 December 2025 to provide for questions and motions on notice, giving ratepayers only 11 days to review and make a submission. Further, on requesting a copy of the annual report at the council office I was told that only on USB and on clarification only on the payment of \$9.50 can I get a hard copy?

a. *How do ratepayers without computers access the report?*

b. *Why is the Annual Report not made available to ratepayers earlier?*

I appreciate detailed answers to these questions, as they touch on issues directly affecting residents and the future of our municipality. Where possible, please reference the relevant sections of the Annual Report or other Council documents to support your responses.