

Kingborough Council

Planning Function Review

June 2026

Executive Summary

Kingborough Council's Planning function is operating in a complex and highly scrutinised environment, with increasing pressure for timely service, clearer communication, consistent decision-making and more accessible customer support.

This report presents the findings of Circular South's functional review of Kingborough Council's statutory planning application process. The review examined the end-to-end process, operating model, customer experience, internal workflows, service performance and improvement opportunities, with a focus on identifying practical changes that can improve efficiency, consistency, transparency and service sustainability.

In making its findings, the review engaged with staff, developers, designers, internal stakeholders and Elected Members, and considered customer and community feedback, operational performance data, process mapping, complaints information and benchmarking with other councils. The review did not assess individual applications, the technical application of the planning scheme to specific applications, or the professional judgement of planners in relation to statutory planning decisions, however recommendations have been made to improve consistency and the approach to application assessment.

The review findings have been framed around three interrelated service performance factors:

- **Demand:** considers the volume and nature of work entering the planning system.
- **Capacity:** considers the effective resources available to complete that work.
- **Effort:** considers the amount of time, rework, coordination and process activity required to progress applications through to decision.

Considered together, these factors provide a clearer explanation of current service pressure and help identify where Council can most effectively improve performance, customer experience and service sustainability.

Demand

The review found that current service pressure is occurring despite a reduction in lodged planning application volumes. Since FY19, lodged planning application volumes have declined with current quarterly volumes below the long-term average. This indicates that current service challenges are unlikely to be driven by increased application volume. However, stakeholder feedback suggests that some development demand may be suppressed or diverted where applicants, developers or consultants perceive Kingborough as more difficult, costly or uncertain to navigate than other councils.

This creates a strategic risk that economic activity may be delayed, diverted to other municipalities or, in some cases, that smaller property owners may choose not

to engage with formal planning pathways. If customer experience, process clarity and service confidence improve, application volumes may increase over time. This would be a positive outcome for Council and the broader municipality but would also need to be supported by improved process efficiency so that renewed demand does not create another capacity squeeze.

Capacity

Internal planning capacity has been under sustained pressure. Although internal planner resource hours have increased over time, effective capacity has been reduced by staff turnover, leave, experience mix and the need for experienced staff to support newer planners. Council has also relied on external planning consultants to maintain service delivery.

The immediate issue is therefore not simply the total number of staff, but the need to stabilise effective capacity while reducing avoidable effort, rework and reliance on higher-cost external support. The report recommends an interim capacity stabilisation strategy to relieve pressure on existing staff, reduce consultant reliance and create the operating capacity needed to implement broader process and service improvements.

This should not be treated as a permanent increase in resourcing. Rather, it should provide temporary internal capacity while Council strengthens its operating model, improves workflow visibility, develops staff capability and implements the recommendations in this report. As efficiency improves, Council should be better positioned to absorb natural attrition and reduce reliance on external consultants.

Effort

The review identified a material efficiency challenge. Available data suggests that the indicative effort required to close each application has approximately doubled over the last eight years. This aligns with the themes identified in staff and stakeholder feedback indicating that internal systems and processes established over time have decreased efficiency.

The Planning function has generally continued to process applications within statutory timeframes, but this appears to be supported by a highly responsive operating model with limited spare capacity. While this may preserve short-term statutory compliance, it leaves limited buffer for workload peaks, service disruption, coaching, quality review and implementation of service improvements. Over time, this can increase reliance on external support and make workforce sustainability more difficult.

A more sustainable model should therefore focus not only on meeting statutory deadlines, but on reducing avoidable effort across the application lifecycle. This includes improving customer information before lodgement, strengthening pre-lodgement support, increasing application submission quality, reducing avoidable RFIs, standardising assessment processing rules, improving referral coordination, establishing clearer internal quality controls, and improving performance tracking and active management.

Customer and Community Confidence

Customer and community confidence remains a significant issue. Applicants and stakeholders are seeking clearer expectations, more practical pre-lodgement guidance, more timely communication, better visibility of application progress and greater consistency in how planning requirements are interpreted and applied.

Elected Member feedback indicated that their experience of receiving constituent concerns suggests some concerns may be perception-based, generalised or not always supported by specific evidence. However, repeated concerns about cost, complexity, timeframes, communication and perceived inconsistency should not be dismissed, as they indicate a broader public confidence issue that needs to be addressed through improved transparency, communication and evidence-based decision-making.

Strategic Opportunity

The transition to the Tasmanian Planning Scheme provides an important opportunity to implement these improvements. Rather than over-investing in processes aligned to the current interim scheme, Council should use the transition period to strengthen the frameworks, assessment guides, customer guidance, digital pathways and internal capability that will remain valuable under the new scheme.

This transition also creates an opportunity to investigate AI-enabled planning support tools, including customer-facing information assistants and planner decision-support capability. These tools should be governed carefully, use approved source content and remain subject to human oversight and professional planner verification.

Priority Recommendations

While the report makes 45 recommendations, ten priority recommendations should be treated as the core implementation focus. Together, these recommendations are intended to stabilise the Planning function, improve management visibility, reduce avoidable effort, strengthen consistency, improve customer experience and rebuild confidence in the planning process.

The priority recommendations are:

1. [Establish a Workforce Stabilisation Strategy](#)
Provides short-term internal capacity to relieve pressure on staff, reduce reliance on higher-cost consultants and create the operating space required to implement broader improvements.
2. [Establish Agreed Operational Success Metrics and Performance Reporting](#)
Creates clear visibility of workload, capacity, performance, quality, timeliness and customer service outcomes so the function can be actively managed rather than operating reactively.
3. [Clarify the Planning Operating Model, Role Accountabilities and Business Continuity](#)
Defines roles, responsibilities, decision rights and continuity arrangements so

work is managed consistently and key functions such as coaching, quality review, knowledge management and operational coordination are protected.

4. [Establish a Centralised Departmental Knowledge Hub](#)
Provides a single source of truth for procedures, assessment guides, templates, and operational updates, reducing reliance on individual knowledge and improving consistency across the team.
5. [Define Internal Assessment Guides](#)
Establishes clearer, agreed guidance for recurring assessment issues so similar matters are handled consistently, reducing rework, escalation and uncertainty in decision-making.
6. [Reduce Avoidable RFIs](#)
Targets one of the major sources of customer frustration, delay and rework by improving application quality, clarifying information requirements earlier and ensuring RFIs are proportionate, consolidated and clearly linked to material assessment issues.
7. [Establish a Defined Pre-Lodgement Service Model](#)
Creates a clearer, more structured approach to pre-lodgement advice by differentiating general enquiries, standard advice, complex technical matters and significant development proposals.
8. [Introduce Guided Customer Journeys to the Kingborough Development Website](#)
Improves customer self-service by guiding applicants through common planning tasks, approval pathways, documentation expectations and next steps before lodgement.
9. [Establish a Customer Journey Governance and Continuous Improvement Process](#)
Ensures customer-facing information, guided pathways and online content remain current, useful and responsive to enquiry trends, feedback and changing planning requirements.
10. [Improve Public Communication on the Role, Outcomes and Transparency of the Planning Process](#)
Strengthens public understanding of the planning system, the purpose of assessment, the role of evidence-based decision-making and the improvements being made to support fairness, transparency and confidence.

Collectively, these priority recommendations address the main drivers identified through the review. They provide the foundation for reducing consultant reliance, improving internal capability, lowering avoidable rework, strengthening consistency of assessment, improving the customer journey and creating a more transparent, predictable and sustainable Planning function.

Implementation Focus

Implementation should be managed as a staged improvement program rather than a set of standalone actions. The priority recommendations provide the starting point, but their value will depend on coordinated sequencing, clear ownership, active governance and regular performance review.

Early implementation should focus on stabilising the workforce, establishing increased visibility of processes, efficiency metrics, increasing leader capacity for process oversight, and clarifying role accountabilities. This will create the capacity and control needed to progress the next layer of improvements, including assessment guides, knowledge management, customer journeys, pre-lodgement service design and RFI reduction.

More advanced digital, AI-enabled and system-integration opportunities should then be progressed once the underlying processes, governance settings and source content are sufficiently mature. This staged approach will allow Council to improve service performance while maintaining statutory integrity, supporting staff wellbeing and preparing the Planning function for a more transparent, scalable and customer-centred future state.

Implementation Risks and Controls

Successful implementation will require active change management, clear governance and protected implementation capacity. The recommendations in this report require changes to ways of working, decision-making behaviours, role accountabilities, customer service practices, use of systems and performance reporting. Given the current reactive operating environment and capacity pressure identified through the review, implementation should not rely solely on planners absorbing additional improvement activity within existing workload.

Key implementation risks include:

- **Process impact risk:** changes to one part of the planning application process may create unintended impacts elsewhere in the workflow if dependencies, handoffs, system requirements, statutory obligations and resourcing implications are not properly assessed before implementation.
- **Change adoption risk:** new assessment guides, role accountabilities, service models and quality controls may not be consistently adopted if expectations, decision rights and escalation pathways are not clearly communicated and reinforced.
- **Capacity risk:** implementation may stall if staff are expected to deliver improvement activity while continuing to operate at or near full assessment capacity.
- **Cultural resistance risk:** movement from individual judgement, informal escalation and locally held knowledge toward standardised assessment guides, shared systems and performance reporting may require active leadership support and change management.
- **Digital sequencing risk:** progressing too many digital initiatives in parallel may dilute effort, increase implementation complexity and reduce the likelihood of sustained adoption.

- **Governance/Legal risk:** without clear decision authority, assessment escalation triggers and ownership, informal decision-making may persist and reduce the impact of the recommendations.
- **Legislative alignment risk:** assessment process rules, assessment guides or interpretation guidance may create confusion or unintended statutory risk if they are not clearly grounded in relevant legislative requirements, planning scheme provisions, approved policy positions, referral authority requirements or applicable tribunal and court guidance.

To mitigate these risks, Council should implement the recommendations as a staged improvement program with clear executive sponsorship, defined workstream owners, agreed decision rights, protected implementation time and regular performance review.

Staff Commitment and Operating Environment

A consistent theme throughout the review was the high level of engagement demonstrated by planning staff. Team members participated openly and constructively in interviews, workshops and feedback sessions, providing detailed insights into current challenges, opportunities for improvement and practical solutions.

Observations through the review indicate that staff are hardworking, professional and genuinely committed to their roles. The review found that many of the current challenges are not the result of individual performance or capability issues. Instead, they reflect the cumulative effect of systems, processes, operating practices and technology arrangements that have evolved over time.

These operational pressures are further compounded by the highly visible and often contentious nature of statutory planning. The review found that staff continue to demonstrate resilience and professionalism despite these pressures and remain committed to supporting improvements that will strengthen both customer outcomes and workforce stability.

The findings of this review should therefore be interpreted in this context. The recommendations are intended to address the systemic causes of the issues identified, improve efficiency, improve the applicant experience, reduce unnecessary effort and create a more sustainable operating environment. They should not be interpreted as criticism of individual staff members. On the contrary, the review found a team that is dedicated, engaged and committed to serving the community.

Table of Contents

1.	Introduction	9
2.	Development Assessment Context in Tasmania	10
3.	Background	12
4.	Circular South.....	12
5.	Our Process.....	13
6.	Stakeholder Insights.....	15
7.	Workforce and Operating Model Insights	18
8.	Operational Performance Insights	21
9.	Strategic and Future Operating Environment Insights.....	28
10.	Workforce Stabilisation and Capacity Strategy.....	30
11.	Pre-Application	38
12.	Lodgement	56
13.	Assessment	72
14.	Customer Service Enquiries.....	82
15.	Request for Information (RFI).....	85
16.	Advertising Period.....	92
17.	Detailed Assessment.....	94
18.	Council Referral	97
19.	Recommendations Matrix and Implementation Plan	101
	Appendix 1 – Development Assessment in Tasmania.....	109

1. Introduction

In March 2026, Circular South was engaged by Kingborough Council to undertake a functional review of the end-to-end statutory planning process. The purpose of the review was to identify current-state challenges, root causes, quick wins, future-state recommendations and an outline improvement plan to support a more efficient, consistent and customer-focused planning service.

Objectives

The stated objectives of the engagement were to:

- i. Systematically identify root causes across process, workload, decision-making and communication.
- ii. Clearly distinguish between:
 - a. Legislated requirements and necessary statutory complexity, and
 - b. Council-specific practices and avoidable inefficiencies, particularly where these relate to risk management, precedent-setting and applicant experience.
- iii. Embed a more customer-focused, solutions-oriented and risk-based approach where appropriate, supporting applicants to better understand requirements and achieve compliant outcomes.
- iv. Enhance the applicant and community experience through clearer, more streamlined and more predictable processes.
- v. Reduce delays, rework and unnecessary handoffs across the planning application process.
- vi. Identify improvements that position Kingborough Council as an innovative planning authority that balances applicant needs, legislative obligations and community outcomes, while supporting the rebuilding of trust with the community.
- vii. Ensure staff, customer and community voices meaningfully inform the review findings and recommendations.

Scope

The initial scope of work focused on the development application planning process including:

- Application pre-lodgement, intake, and validation,
- Triage and prioritisation,
- Assessment workflows.
- Requests for further information (RFIs),
- Referrals and internal handoffs,
- Decision-making and delegations,
- Applicant and community communication, including applicant expectations.
- Internal operating rhythm, including how work is planned, prioritised, and managed,
- Functional accountabilities and cultural challenges and improvement opportunities.

A subsequent and separate scope of work will be developed based on the recommendations for implementation.

The review did not:

- Assess individual applications,
- Review the technical application of the planning scheme to individual applications,
- Assess the professional judgement of planners in relation to statutory planning decisions, recommendations, conditions or interpretations, or
- Review processes outside of the Planning function.

Deliverables

Key deliverables for the engagement include:

- Documented high-level current-state view of the end-to-end process,
- Community, stakeholder and staff engagement insights,
- Identification of quick wins, where applicable,
- Future-state recommendations, and
- Prioritised, actionable improvement roadmap.

2. Development Assessment Context in Tasmania

Development assessment in Tasmania operates within a detailed statutory framework established by State legislation and planning instruments. Local councils act as Planning Authorities and are responsible for administering and applying these requirements. However, the rules that determine whether development can be approved are largely prescribed by the *Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993*, the relevant Planning Scheme, other relevant statutory planning instruments and case law.

This context is important when considering the findings and recommendations in this report. As this framework is the primary driver of the assessment processes and rules within which Council officers assess applications, request information, refer matters, apply planning scheme provisions, consider representations and make or support statutory decisions. These statutory requirements for the assessment of development applications are mandatory and carry significant consequences if they are not properly applied. In undertaking this role, Council acts as the regulator and must balance assisting applicants in understanding the available pathways and, where possible, delivering the outcomes they are seeking with an efficient streamlined process and the need to remain objective, fair, impartial, and compliant when administering the Planning Scheme.

There will be circumstances where a proposed development cannot be approved on a particular parcel of land because it does not satisfy the requirements of the Scheme. In these situations, Council has very limited discretion and cannot simply waive or ignore statutory requirements.

This does not mean Council accepts that all planning provisions are operating optimally. Council regularly identifies practical issues and unintended consequences arising from the operation of the planning system and actively raises these matters with relevant State agencies, participates in planning system reviews, provides submissions on proposed reforms, and advocates for change where experience demonstrates improvements are needed.

Planning assessment requires Council to determine whether a proposal is exempt, whether a permit is required, how the proposed use and development should be classified, and which zones, codes, overlays, standards and statutory provisions apply. Many standards include both prescriptive requirements and performance-based pathways. This means that assessment often requires professional judgement, technical evidence, site-specific analysis and consideration of relevant tribunal or court guidance.

Requests for further information, internal and external referrals, public notification, permit conditions and appeal rights are also part of the statutory planning framework. While these processes can create frustration for applicants and community members, when used appropriately they are intended to ensure that decisions are lawful, evidence-based, procedurally fair and capable of withstanding review.

Planning decisions are also highly visible and frequently scrutinised because they can directly affect homes, neighbourhoods, businesses, property values, views, amenity, infrastructure, environmental values and local character. Applicants may be frustrated when a proposal is delayed, conditioned or refused. Neighbours and community members may be dissatisfied when a proposal is approved despite objections being received. This means that some degree of complexity, judgement, statutory process and community tension is inherent in the planning system.

The recommendations in this report should therefore be read in this context. They are not intended to remove necessary statutory rigour, replace professional planning judgement or suggest that all complexity is Council-created. Rather, they are intended to focus on the areas Council can influence, including customer information, pre-lodgement guidance, application quality, communication, workflow visibility, internal coordination, assessment guides, assessment consistency, resourcing, capability, reporting and service design.

Further detail on the Tasmanian planning and development assessment framework is provided in [Appendix 1 – Development Assessment in Tasmania](#).

3. Background

Within this statutory planning environment, Kingborough Council's Planning function has been operating under sustained service pressure. Staff were understood to be working at or near capacity, with limited buffer to absorb workload peaks, shrinkage due to leave, turnover or changes in application complexity. The department had also experienced staff turnover and loss of experienced planning capability, increasing reliance on newer staff and external planning consultants to support service delivery.

Operationally, work was largely managed through established practices, individual knowledge and tactical responses to immediate workload demands. Formal governance structures, performance measures, process improvement mechanisms and forward planning tools were not consistently embedded across the end-to-end process, limiting visibility of workload, capacity, effort, recurring issues and service performance.

Externally, the planning process was operating in an environment of heightened customer and community scrutiny, with increasing expectations for clearer communication, predictable timeframes, accessible information and transparent decision-making.

This operating environment created the need for a whole-of-function review to establish a clear current-state view, distinguish between necessary legislative complexity and avoidable operational inefficiency, and identify practical opportunities to improve customer experience, staff capability, process consistency, service visibility, overall planning performance, staff wellbeing and the workplace environment.

4. Circular South

Circular South is a Tasmanian-based consultancy firm, providing a range of services to Tasmanian state and local Government, GBEs and private enterprises. These services enable our clients to achieve productivity improvements; delivery of complex projects; regulatory compliance; and environmental sustainability.

The Circular South consultants who undertook the review of Kingborough Council's planning function were:

Jed Arnold – Managing Director

As Principal for Circular South, Jed provided strategic background, advice and direction during the course of the engagement.

Marc Portlock – Lead Consultant

As lead consultant for this engagement, Marc was responsible for undertaking the functional review, conducting stakeholder engagement, analysing current-state process and operational issues, identifying key themes and root causes, and developing the findings and recommendations contained in this report.

5. Our Process

The review was undertaken as a whole-of-function assessment, focused on identifying systemic issues, recurring themes and practical improvement opportunities, rather than auditing individual applications or evaluating individual staff performance.

Methodology

Circular South undertook the following activities in completing the functional review:

- Conducted individual and group interviews with members of the Statutory Planning, Environmental Planning and Planning Support teams, identifying 274 individual problem statements.
- Conducted interviews with internal department heads and key stakeholders across Kingborough Council.
- Conducted interviews with seven key Kingborough developers and consultants, identifying an additional 137 individual problem statements relating to customer experience and service delivery.
- Conducted interviews with Clarence City Council and Huon Valley Council and reviewed neighbouring council websites to benchmark current customer experiences, service models and planning information frameworks.
- Analysed customer complaints received over the past three years.
- Surveyed the majority of Kingborough Elected Members to understand constituent feedback and perceptions of the planning process.
- Grouped individual problem statements into key themes, which were then tested through a structured playback process to confirm experience, refine understanding and support further root cause analysis.
- The end-to-end [Statutory Planning Application process](#) was mapped to document the key process stages, decision points, handoffs, roles and supporting activities across the application lifecycle.
- As part of the review, a separate operational quick-wins summary was prepared for management, capturing smaller improvement opportunities identified during the review. These actions are not outlined in detail within this report but are intended to support near-term operational improvement and complement the broader recommendations.
- Consideration of previous review outcomes.

Where reliable data was available, it has been used to inform the review findings. However, the current data environment does not support full quantification of all benefits at recommendation level. The benefits should therefore be read as expected operational, customer, governance and workforce outcomes, rather than as a fully quantified financial business case.

Improved performance reporting, effort tracking and benefit measurement should be established as part of implementation to enable Council to baseline current performance, monitor improvement and quantify benefits over time.

Design Principles

After consulting with staff and key stakeholders, the following design principles guiding all recommendations were workshopped and agreed:

- **Regulatory Alignment:** As the relevant planning authority, all options must operate within legislative and regulatory requirements.
- **Customer Focus:** Support a customer-centric solutions-based approach that guides applicants through regulatory requirements to achieve compliant outcomes, while maintaining integrity, fairness and consistency.
- **Standardisation & Consistency:** Improved standardisation of processes, decision frameworks and ways of working to ensure consistency, fairness and scalability.
- **Sustainable Capacity:** Build sufficient capacity and contingency so staff are not operating continuously at peak load and can step away without impacting performance.
- **Fit-for-Purpose / Risk-Based Approach:** Apply a risk-based approach so effort, rigour and documentation are aligned to the complexity and impact of each application.
- **Governance & Accountability:** Establish clear governance, decision rights and escalation pathways that support timely and accountable decision-making.
- **Focus on Value-Adding Work:** As a specialist function, we maximise capacity for decision-making by reducing non-value-adding tasks.
- **Reduce Cognitive Load:** Minimise the mental burden on staff by ensuring the right information is easy to access at the right time.
- **Empowerment & Autonomy:** As a values-based organisation, we enable staff with the clarity, tools and support to make decisions confidently.
- **Continuous Improvement & Feedback Loops:** Embed continuous improvement by using feedback, data and experience to regularly refine processes, decisions and ways of working.

6. Stakeholder Insights

Scope

As part of the Planning Function Review, stakeholder feedback was gathered to better understand how Council's planning services are experienced by customers, professional applicants, and internal departments. This included interviews with seven key developers, consultants and five internal department heads that identified 137 individual problem statements relating to customer experience and service delivery. External participants were selected to provide a representative cross-section of stakeholders who regularly engage with Council's planning processes involved in both small- and large-scale development projects.

This feedback was considered alongside an analysis of all customer planning complaints received over the past three years and the results of a recent survey completed by the majority of Kingborough Elected Members. Together, these sources provide a broad view of how current planning service challenges are experienced across different stakeholder groups.

While individual perspectives varied, the feedback points to a consistent set of themes relating to communication, timeliness, customer expectations, RFIs, consistency of advice, process transparency and confidence in the planning process. A recurring theme is that customers and stakeholders are not simply seeking favourable decisions; they are seeking clear expectations, practical guidance, timely communication and confidence that the process is being managed consistently, fairly and transparently.

Where these elements are absent, technical requirements and statutory timeframes are more likely to be interpreted as obstruction, inconsistency or poor service, even where the statutory process itself is being followed.

Key Themes

- i) **Timeliness, responsiveness and access to advice:** Responses indicate frustration with delayed responses, difficulty accessing planners and limited visibility of progress or next steps. Customers often rely on repeated follow-up to obtain updates, which increases frustration and adds avoidable demand to Customer Service and planning staff.
- ii) **Unclear expectations and limited early guidance:** Applicants are not always clear on what information is required, what process pathway applies or what risks need to be addressed before lodgement. Pre-application engagement is not consistently perceived as providing sufficient certainty, with some stakeholders reporting that matters discussed early can later reappear through formal RFIs.
- iii) **RFIs, rework and late-emerging requirements:** Requests for further information are a major source of frustration across external and internal feedback. Stakeholders report repeated, sequential or late-stage RFIs, sometimes perceived as generic, overly detailed, poorly coordinated or not clearly linked to

material assessment issues. This increases time, cost, rework and uncertainty for applicants and Council.

- iv) **Governance, escalation and assessment rule gaps:** Feedback points to the need for clearer assessment guides, precedent management, escalation pathways and internal decision-making authority. Where policy positions and assessment expectations are not formally defined, similar issues may be reconsidered repeatedly, leading to variable outcomes, additional effort and uncertainty. Without a standardised internal decision-making framework, Council does not have a consistent foundation from which to iterate improvements.
- v) **Inconsistency in interpretation, advice and outcomes:** Planning assessments are guided by legislation, policy and established procedures, however they also rely on the professional knowledge and judgement of experienced staff to apply those requirements to individual circumstances. While every development proposal is different, reliance on individual knowledge and experience can result in variation in how matters are initially approached or communicated. Establishing more consistent guidance, templates and assessment frameworks can provide a common starting point for decision-making, improve transparency and reduce perceptions of unpredictability or unfairness.
- vi) **Perceived over-processing and lack of risk-based assessment:** External stakeholders frequently described the process as overly bureaucratic, rigid or disproportionate to the scale and risk of the proposal. Lower-risk matters are sometimes perceived to receive the same level of scrutiny as more complex applications, increasing effort, cost and delays without always improving planning outcomes.
- vii) **Integration of professional inputs and technical advice:** Developers, consultants and internal technical teams raised concerns that specialist advice is not always integrated into the assessment process in a consistent or transparent way. This can create duplication of effort, increase applicant costs and affect confidence in how technical inputs are considered.
- viii) **Fragmented internal workflows and referral processes:** Internal feedback indicates that referral processes, General Manager consent, case management workflows and cross-department handoffs can be fragmented, manual or inconsistently governed. This contributes to duplication, delays, unclear ownership and reliance on individual staff knowledge rather than standardised systems. It is noted that General Managers consent is not managed by the planning team, however it is contributing to delay and applicant frustration.

- ix) **Customer experience and stakeholder confidence:** Feedback described a view that Kingborough can be more difficult, costly or uncertain to work with than other councils, with some consultants indicating that additional time and cost may be allowed for when supporting clients through the process. This creates a strategic risk that development activity may be delayed, diverted to other municipalities or made more costly for applicants.
- x) There is also a risk that smaller property owners may be less likely to engage with formal planning pathways, increasing the likelihood of unapproved works, and undermining confidence in Council's role as the planning authority.

Focus Areas – Stakeholder Insights

Overall, the stakeholder feedback supports the need for recommendations that address both process efficiency and the broader operating model. This includes:

- **Improve clarity and predictability** by setting clearer expectations upfront, providing better pre-lodgement guidance and explaining requirements, timeframes and next steps more consistently.
- **Strengthen communication and transparency** through clearer service standards, more timely updates, improved visibility of application progress and better explanation of decisions and RFIs.
- **Reducing avoidable rework and delay** by improving application quality, coordinating RFIs more effectively and ensuring information requests are proportionate, justified and clearly linked to assessment requirements.
- **Improve consistency and confidence in decision-making** through clearer assessment guides, escalation pathways, precedent management, quality controls and more consistent interpretation of planning requirements.
- **Consistently apply a proportionate, risk-based approach** so effort, scrutiny and documentation requirements are better aligned to the scale, complexity and risk of each application.

7. Workforce and Operating Model Insights

Scope

Feedback was also gathered through individual interviews and team playback sessions to understand how staff experience the current planning application process, operating model, systems, workload and decision-making environment. Feedback identified 274 individual problem statements that were grouped into key themes and tested through a structured playback process to confirm their experience and support further root cause analysis.

The feedback indicates that many of the challenges experienced by external customers are also visible internally. Staff described an operating model under sustained pressure, with opportunities to improve role clarity, process consistency, workflow visibility, decision support, training, quality review and continuous improvement.

While the feedback reflected different individual perspectives, the consistent internal theme is that the current operating environment is highly reactive. The function is focused on maintaining statutory timeframes, but has limited spare capacity to improve processes, support capability development or address recurring issues at their source.

Key Themes

- i) **Role clarity, responsibilities and ownership:** Internal feedback indicates that responsibilities between roles and teams are not always clearly defined, with overlapping duties and inconsistent understanding of who should perform specific tasks. This contributes to delays, duplication, rework and reduced accountability.
- ii) **Approach does not always correspond to risk or complexity:** Applications are not consistently segmented by risk or complexity. Minor and complex matters can be processed using similar levels of rigour and documentation, resulting in effort not always being proportionate to the nature of the application and reducing capacity to focus on higher-risk or more complex matters.
- iii) **Reliance on key individuals and limited operational contingency:** Some components of critical knowledge, review of draft assessment material and informal process appear to sit with a small number of experienced staff. This creates bottlenecks and single points of failure when key individuals are unavailable, on leave or leave the organisation, reducing the resilience and scalability of the planning function.
- iv) **Capacity pressure and reactive ways of working:** Internal feedback indicates that the team often feel that they are operating at or near capacity, with limited buffer for workload peaks, unexpected issues or staff absence. This contributes to reactive work practices and reduced capacity for proactive planning, training, coaching, process improvement and quality review.

- v) **Onboarding, training and development:** Training and development frameworks are not consistently structured or embedded. New and less experienced staff rely heavily on informal 'on the job' learning and support from experienced staff, increasing time to being at full capacity and placing additional workload pressure on those providing support.
- vi) **Process documentation, and accessibility:** Staff feedback indicates that processes are not always clearly defined, or easy to locate. Guidance materials may be incomplete, require update or difficult to access.
- vii) **Quality controls and internal decision-making frameworks:** While planning assessments are guided by legislation, policy and professional expertise, there can be variations in how complex or unique matters are approached. Further refinement of shared processes and guidance will support greater consistency, reduce rework and enhance confidence in decision-making.
- viii) **Feedback loops and continuous improvement:** Recurring issues are not always systematically reviewed, learned from or translated into process improvements. Without structured feedback loops, the same problems can continue to occur, limiting the organisation's ability to improve decision-making, quality, efficiency and customer experience over time.
- ix) **Systems and tools do not fully support the end-to-end workflow:** Multiple systems and spreadsheets are utilised to complete tasks. This creates duplication, inconsistent data capture, reduced data integrity and limited visibility of workload, application progress, performance and bottlenecks.
- x) **Workload, performance and workflow status:** Council's case management system provides a useful source of application status information; however, opportunities remain to improve the consistency, accessibility and accuracy of workflow information across the end-to-end process.
- xi) **Communications are not always clear:** Feedback indicates that communication of changes and internal decisions has not been historically consistent across the team. Where staff do not have a shared understanding of expectations or rationale for decisions, this can contribute to misalignment, duplication of effort and reduced confidence.
- xii) **Workflow and internal decision framework:** The team's focus on delivering assessment outcomes and responding to ongoing workload demands can limit opportunities for structured improvement activities, reflection and capability development. Further development of decision-making frameworks, escalation pathways and quality assurance processes would support greater consistency, knowledge sharing and confidence in assessment practice.

- xiii) **Data, reporting and continuous improvement:** There are opportunities to improve visibility and analysis of enquiry volumes, response times, workflow bottlenecks and service performance. This would support Council's ability to forecast demand, allocate resources, identify recurring issues and implement targeted service improvements.
- xiv) **High-scrutiny customer interactions and service resilience:** The feedback indicates that staff work in an environment involving complex rules, frustrated customers, statutory deadlines and public visibility. Improved escalation pathways, training, support and appropriate controls are required to support safe, consistent and resilient service delivery.

Focus Areas – Staff Insights

Internal feedback indicates that the planning function's challenges are not limited to customer behaviour, application complexity or statutory requirements. The feedback points to a broader operating model issue including:

- **Clarify the operating model** by defining roles, responsibilities, ownership, handoffs and decision rights across the planning process.
- **Build a more sustainable capacity model** by improving workload management, leave planning, succession planning and reducing reliance on key individuals.
- **Develop staff capability and confidence** through structured onboarding, training, coaching and clearer expectations for progression to competency.
- **Standardise processes and assessment guides** so staff have clear, accessible and consistent guidance on how work should be completed.
- **Improve systems, workflow visibility and reporting** so workload, application status, bottlenecks, performance and resource pressure can be actively managed.
- **Supporting staff wellbeing and safety** by improving workload controls, escalation pathways, de-escalation capability and leadership support.

8. Operational Performance Insights

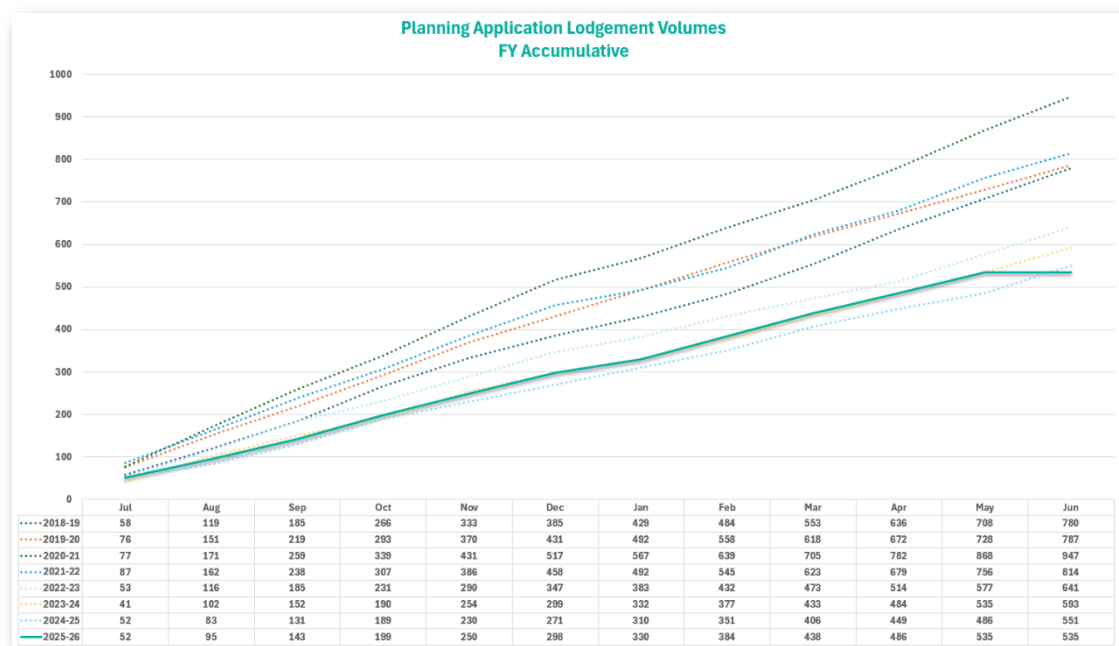
In addition to gathering key stakeholder and internal feedback, three broad factors have been considered in assessing the current service performance:

- **Demand:** the amount and type of work received,
- **Capacity:** the resources available to complete that work, and
- **Effort:** the time and activity required to progress the work.

Understanding the relationship between these factors is critical, as service pressure may be caused by changes in demand, available capacity, effort required, or any combination of these factors.

Demand

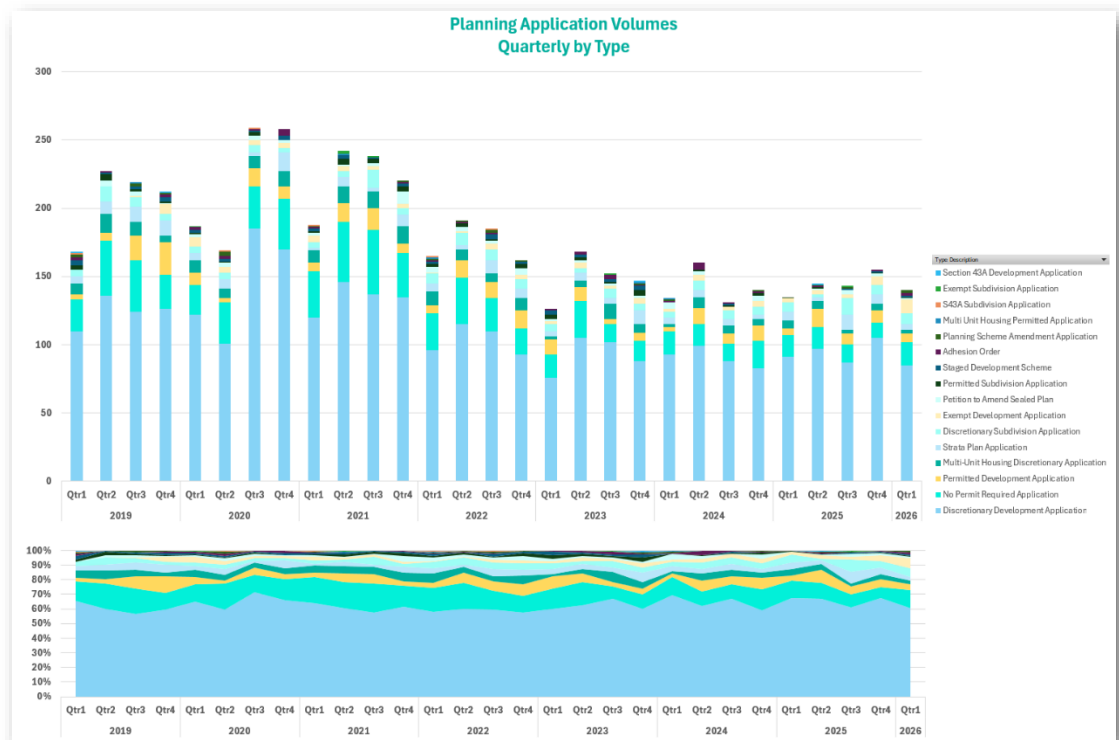
At a macro level, reporting drawn from Council's case management planning application records from July 2018 to present (figure 1), indicates that overall planning application volumes peaked in FY2020–21, potentially influenced by additional stimulus activity and changed development behaviour during the COVID-19 period, and have since shown a year-on-year decline.



(Figure 1 – Planning Application Lodgement Volumes Annual FY Accumulative FY2018–26)

This trend is further supported by analysis of quarterly lodgements over the same period in figure 2. Quarterly lodgements averaged around 220 in mid-to-late 2019, declined in early 2020 to 169, rose sharply again in Q3 and Q4 2020, and have since gradually declined to remain relatively steady over the last two years at an average of approximately 145 applications per quarter¹.

¹ Includes permitted, discretionary and minor amendments.



(Figure 2 – Planning Application Lodgement Volumes Quarterly by Type 2018–26)

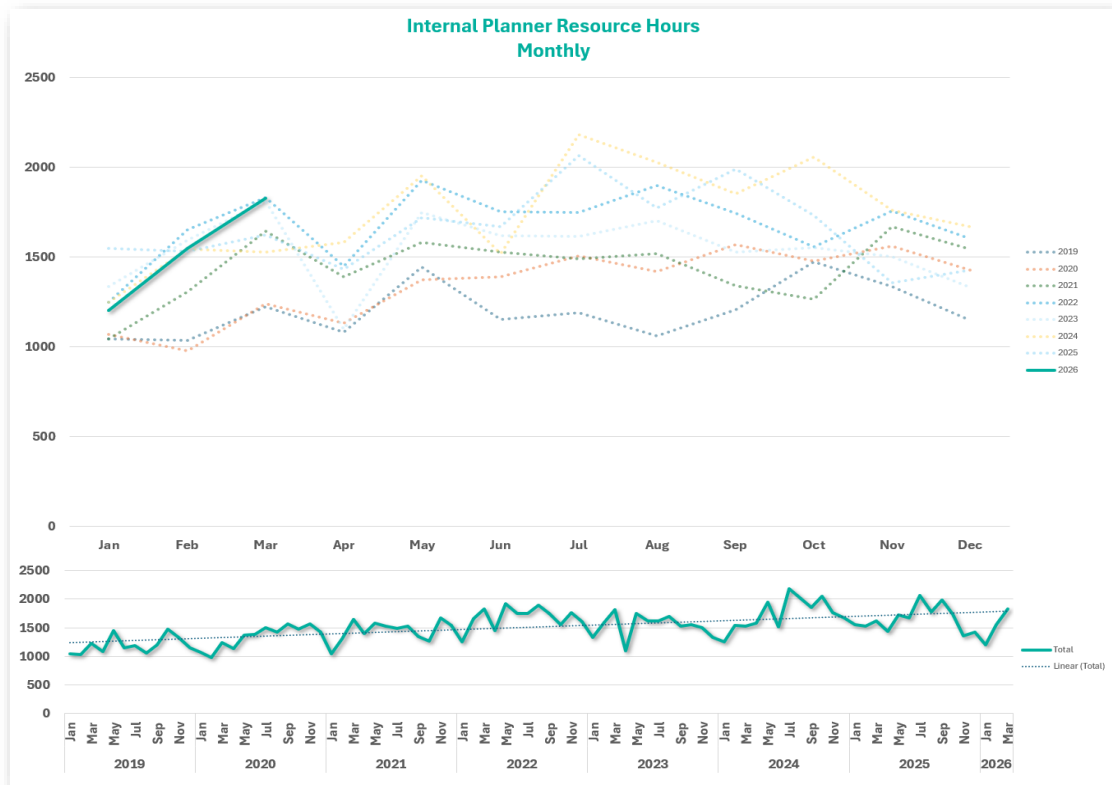
There is a spectrum of complexity associated with different application types that is not easily measured within Council's case management system. However, analysis of application types lodged over the period does not show a material shift in the overall application mix. While this does not provide a precise measure of complexity, it does not indicate a clear structural shift in application type that would explain current service pressure.

On this basis, the available data does not suggest that current service pressure is being driven by an increase in application volume or a clear shift in application type.

It is also important to distinguish between lodged application volume and underlying development demand. Interview feedback suggests that uncertainty, delays and friction within the planning process may discourage some applicants from lodging applications, particularly where developers can prioritise opportunities in other municipalities or where smaller property owners may choose not to engage with the planning process. This means declining lodgement volumes may not fully reflect underlying development interest and may, in some cases, indicate suppressed or diverted demand rather than a simple reduction in planning activity.

Capacity

Analysis of internal planner resource hours per month from 2018², indicates that monthly resource hours remain within the broader historical range but have increased over time, with the year-on-year trend suggesting an uplift in internal planner resource hours compared with earlier years³.



(Figure 3 – Internal Planner Resource Hours Monthly 2018-26)

However, reported resource hours do not necessarily reflect the capacity practically available to progress assessment work. Effective capacity can be reduced by staff turnover, leave, onboarding requirements, work allocation practices, experience mix and time spent supporting less experienced staff.

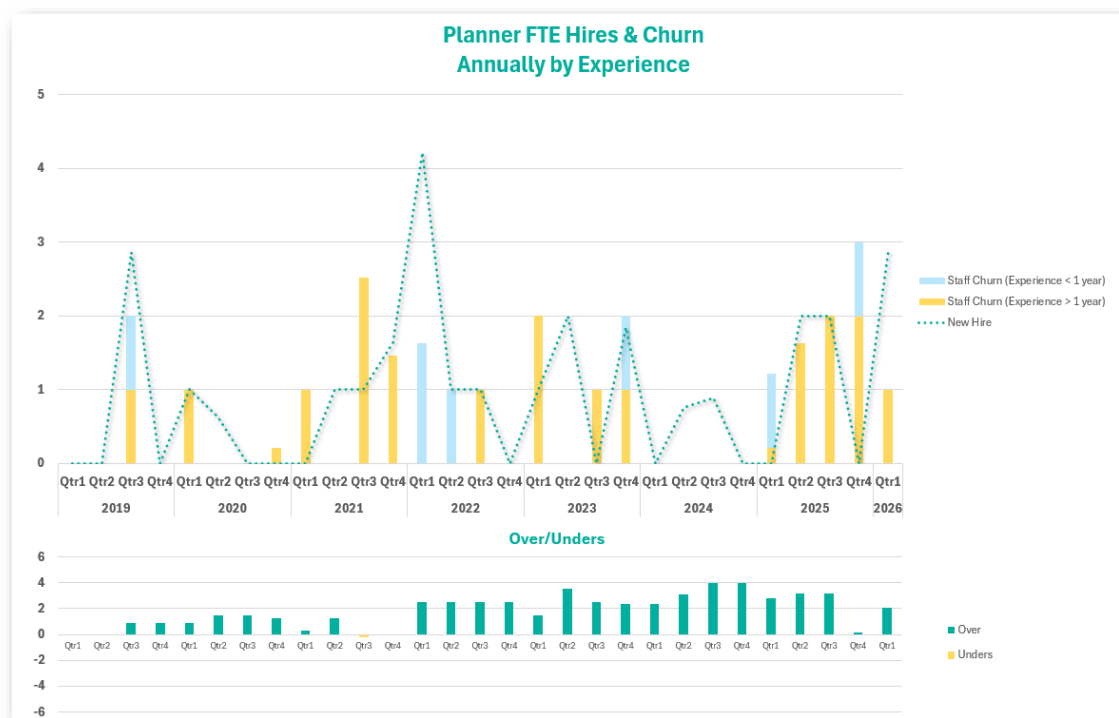
² Assessment of Planner specific roles only. Excludes Planning Support (admin), Planning Technical Officer (pre-application support), Building and Plumbing, and Environmental Planning roles.

³ Note seasonal reductions are evident in January, April and December, reflecting the impact of public holidays and leave periods.

Internal planning capacity has also been supplemented at times by external planning consultant resources to manage temporary capacity shortfalls. Analysis indicates a significant increase in external planning consultant expenditure from Q2 2025. This should be understood as an anomalous period, rather than a standard operating pattern, and was due to combination of several staff vacancies, unplanned leave, staff turnover and the need to maintain service delivery while recruitment was underway or while staff were expected to return from leave.

While the use of consultants was a practical response to immediate and urgent capacity constraints, it also indicates that Council did not have ample contingency within the current systems or resourcing framework and reinforced the importance of distinguishing between total rostered capacity and effective available capacity.

Analysis of planner FTE hires and churn in figure 4 shows an over/under trend broadly consistent with the internal resource hours shown above. While changes in experienced staff also affect service efficiency, capability and quality, from a capacity perspective the over/under buffer reduced to approximately zero during Q4 2025.



(Figure 4 – Planning Quarterly Staff Hires & Churn by Experience 2019-26)

This appears to have created a hidden reduction in effective capacity that is not fully visible through FTE or resource-hour reporting alone. Where available capacity is reduced, the function has less flexibility to absorb workload peaks, maintain quality review, support development activity and implement service improvements while continuing to meet statutory timeframes. This is further supported by analysis of internal planner shrinkage per FTE, which indicates an increase in non-available resource hours over recent years, particularly through sick leave and periods of elevated leave.

While leave is a normal and necessary feature of workforce management, sustained or increasing levels of shrinkage can reduce effective capacity and create additional pressure on remaining staff, particularly where leave coincides with staff turnover, recruitment gaps or periods of higher workload. Increases in non-available time can compound temporary bottlenecks where work is concentrated among fewer available experienced planners, particularly when this coincides with recruitment gaps, turnover or periods of higher workload.

Taken together, the data suggests that the planning function's capacity challenge is not simply a question of total FTE or rostered hours. Rather, the issue appears to relate to limited understanding of effective available capacity and the need for stronger real-time and forward-looking workforce management, including recruitment planning, annual leave allocation management, staff development support through onboarding, coaching and training, and the ability to transfer work between staff effectively. Where available capacity is constrained, Council is more likely to rely on external consultant resources and has less capacity for quality review, service improvement and capability development.

Effort

While Council's case management system can provide information on application submission and closure dates, it does not currently capture the amount of staff effort or resource hours required to process individual applications. This limits the ability to accurately measure effort per application, identify where time is being consumed, or distinguish between delays caused by complexity, necessary statutory requirements, insufficient application material, process inefficiency, rework, capability constraints or competing workload demands.

For the purpose of high-level comparison, a proxy measure has been developed by comparing the number of applications closed annually against internal planner resource hours over the same period. This produces an indicative application closure rate per planner resource hour.

The analysis indicates that the effective rate of application closure has reduced materially over time, from approximately 0.66 application closures per planner resource hour in FY2019–20 to approximately 0.35 in FY2025–26. While this measure should not be interpreted as a precise productivity measure, it suggests that either more effort is being required to close each application, and/or that available planner capacity is being absorbed by other activities not directly resulting in application closures.

Although data visibility is limited, trend analysis together with feedback gathered through the review, indicates that service efficiency may be affected by a combination of factors including:

- Informal onboarding and development arrangements which can affect the speed at which newly recruited staff build confidence and capability in complex assessment work.
- Applications that are incomplete or require significant clarification, resulting in additional requests for information, follow-up communication and assessment effort.
- Review and standardisation processes can be inconsistent, limiting opportunities to systematically identify development needs, share knowledge and support continuous improvement.
- Work allocation and business processes that rely on specialised knowledge held by a small number of individuals, creating challenges for workload distribution, succession planning and business continuity.
- Additional process requirements introduced over time, including Planning Start Works and the revised General Manager consent process, which have increased workflow and administrative requirements. The implementation of these changes may not have been fully supported by corresponding adjustments to roles, systems, guidance materials or consideration of broader operational impacts.

Note: Closure rate is one indicator of efficiency, however it is not a definitive measure because it can be materially affected by other variables. For example, some development applications are highly complex due to their scale, location or technical requirements. For subdivisions, a single application may represent the

creation of many lots (large subdivisions can be over 100 lots). In 2025/26 in particular, several large development applications were assessed, approved or remain in assessment, including the AFL High-Performance Centre, Oval 3 for the High-Performance Centre precinct, Spring Farm Village, a supermarket, a multimillion-dollar retirement facility, 44 independent living units, and the Huntingfield Estate Stage 2 and 3 applications. These matters can require a significant amount of one officer's time over an extended period and may involve dozens of technical documents and plans. Proposals such as these often evolve during assessment, which may require reassessment against relevant planning scheme provisions.

With that in mind, overall, the available data suggests that the planning function is experiencing a reduction in effective throughput, despite application volumes declining and internal planner resource hours having increased over time. While the current systems do not allow effort to be measured precisely at application level, the closure-rate trend and interview feedback indicate that improving efficiency will require better measurement of effort, reduced rework, clearer decision-making frameworks, stronger quality controls and a more consistent risk-based approach to assessments.

Focus Areas – Operational Performance Insights

Based on the observations made above, recommendations in this report should focus on addressing the system-level drivers of workload pressure, improving the effective use of available planning capacity, and reducing avoidable effort across the planning application process. This includes:

- **Improving visibility of demand, capacity, effort, workload distribution and performance** so management can better understand where pressure is occurring and respond earlier.
- **Move from a reactive environment to a more proactive workforce planning** and effective capacity management.
- **Reduce avoidable demand** on non-core activities.
- **Reduce inefficiencies related to poor application quality** at lodgement.
- **Reducing rework** by strengthening triage, allocation, quality controls, peer review, RFI management and handover practices.
- **Establishing clearer governance**, internal decision-making frameworks and assessment guides to improve consistency and efficiency of assessments.
- **Strengthen continuous improvement practices.**
- **Reduce reliance on key individuals and external consultants** by building internal capability, improved documentation, standardising processes and addressing single points of failure.
- **Improve customer experience and stakeholder confidence** by providing clearer expectations, more transparent communication, better access to advice and more predictable process pathways.

9. Strategic and Future Operating Environment Insights

In addition to the current operating context and stakeholder feedback, several external and strategic factors should be considered when designing the future state of the planning application process as they create both risk and opportunity.

Considerations

- i) **Tasmanian Planning Scheme Transition:** Kingborough is currently progressing its transition to the Tasmanian Planning Scheme, with implementation anticipated within the next 6–12 months, creating a significant change point for customers, staff and systems, and is likely to increase the need for clear guidance, consistent interpretation, updated assessment guides and plain-language customer information. It also creates an opportunity to redesign customer journeys, forms, advice pathways and digital tools around the future planning framework rather than continuing to invest heavily in processes aligned to the current interim scheme.
- ii) **Kingborough Council's Digital Strategy 2025–2030** provides a strong strategic mandate for modernising the planning service through simpler, more connected and more customer-focused digital services. The strategy recognises that Council is facing rising community expectations, ageing systems, manual workflows, fragmented data and low digital confidence, and sets a 2030 vision for simple, secure and connected services that make everyday interactions easier for residents, businesses and staff. Key priorities directly relevant to the planning function include a Digital Front Door for customer interactions, digitised forms and approvals, real-time service tracking, improved communication and transparency, better use of digital workplace tools, stronger data governance and reporting, and responsible use of AI to improve efficiency while maintaining human oversight.
- iii) **Existing Systems Capabilities:** Council has access to productivity and collaboration tools such as Microsoft 365; however, staff feedback indicates that technology is not always supported by consistent process design, training or adoption. Better use of existing tools may provide lower-cost opportunities to improve appointment scheduling, shared workflows, document collaboration, customer communication templates, reporting and internal knowledge management before more complex system changes are implemented.
- iv) **Adoption of AI in the Planning Space:** [Huon Valley Council](#) has recently launched an AI Planning Assistant to help customers with pre-application planning enquiries, including understanding whether development or use may be permitted, identifying relevant zone and code overlay requirements, navigating the application process and accessing planning scheme information. Huon Valley promotes the service as a 24/7 phone-based AI Planning Agent providing plain-English planning guidance, developed specifically for the Tasmanian Planning Scheme.

Note that Huon Valley has only recently begun trials and therefore reporting is currently not available. Anecdotal feedback suggests initial rollout has been very positive.

While these tools remain emerging and should be carefully governed, they demonstrate a practical direction for Council to consider. AI-enabled tools could potentially support general pre-lodgement enquiries, assist customers to navigate planning requirements in plain language, help planners research applicable planning scheme provisions and assessment guides, and support clearer drafting of customer communications. Any such capability should be positioned as an information, navigation and decision-support tool, not a substitute for formal planning advice, professional judgement or statutory assessment.

- v) **Centralised Customer Support Strategy:** Council has previously supported a more centralised customer support model, but planning enquiries can be difficult to centralise because they often require technical judgement. The future model should therefore distinguish between non-technical navigation support, which can be provided through Customer Service and digital channels, and technical planning advice, which should be provided through defined escalation, appointment and pre-lodgement pathways. This would allow Council to improve customer access while protecting planning staff capacity for work requiring professional judgement.

Focus Areas – Strategic and Future Operating Environment Insights

These strategic and external factors suggest that recommendations should not only address current process inefficiencies but also prepare the planning function for a more digital, guided and scalable future state. In particular, recommendations should:

- **Design process solutions around the incoming Tasmanian Planning Scheme** rather than over-investing in interim arrangements.
- **Use the transition to the new scheme as an opportunity** to improve plain-language customer guidance, internal interpretation support and consistent decision-making frameworks.
- **Explore AI-enabled information tools** for general planning support and initial assessment, while ensuring appropriate governance, disclaimers, source control, escalation pathways and human oversight.
- **Improve the use of existing digital productivity tools** for workflow coordination, shared templates, internal knowledge management and reporting.
- **Support a centralised customer support model** that separates non-technical navigation support from technical planning advice.
- **Maintain assisted and non-digital pathways** for customers with limited digital access or low digital confidence.

10. Workforce Stabilisation and Capacity Strategy

Summary

The Planning function is currently operating in a constrained and reactive environment. Although lodged application volumes have declined, effective capacity has been reduced by staff turnover, leave, onboarding demands, experience mix and the need for experienced staff to support newer planners. This has contributed to an increased reliance on external consultants to maintain service delivery, creating a higher-cost operating response rather than a sustainable workforce model.

The current position also appears to reflect an effort-related efficiency problem. Available data suggests that more planner time is being consumed per application, which is consistent with staff and customer feedback relating to inefficient processes, increased RFI reliance and rework, unclear assessment guides, inconsistent quality controls and reliance on key individuals.

An interim capacity stabilisation strategy is therefore required to stabilise the function while the broader recommendations in this report are implemented. This should not be treated as a permanent measure. Rather, it should provide temporary internal capacity to reduce consultant reliance, relieve pressure on existing staff, support implementation of efficiency improvements and create a pathway back to a lower-cost sustainable staffing model.

Recommendations

1. [Establish an Interim Capacity Stabilisation Strategy to Reduce Consultant Reliance and Stabilise the Planning Workforce](#)

Council should establish an interim capacity stabilisation strategy:

- i. Bring forward the current planner replacement recruitment strategy to provide interim FTE capacity. This should be positioned as a temporary stabilisation measure to increase internal capacity.
- ii. Once established, Council should use the increased capacity to reduce reliance where possible on external planning consultants and reduce overall operating costs.
- iii. Use the interim increase capacity to address the efficiency and effort gaps identified in this report. This should include reducing rework, improving application quality, strengthening triage, standardising assessment guides, improving quality controls, reducing avoidable RFIs and improving workflow visibility. As these improvements reduce effort, natural attrition should be utilised where appropriate to gradually reduce resource allocation for the function.
- iv. Aligning this approach with preparation for the Tasmanian Planning Scheme transition. Rather than investing significant effort in refining

technical assessment practices for an interim planning scheme, Council should use the next 12 months to strengthen process, framework and capability foundations that will remain relevant under the new scheme.

- v. Council should also use the transition period to support the implementation, governance and training of AI-enabled planning tools in line with the Kingborough Digital Strategy. The objective should be to reduce avoidable demand and assessment effort and reduce the need for additional capacity into FY2028.
- vi. This approach should be reviewed quarterly against an agreed set of workforce and performance indicators, including consultant expenditure, planner workload, sick leave, staff turnover, and application throughput to ensure capacity targets are maintained during the period.

Benefit:

- Improved short-term planning capacity while the broader process and efficiency recommendations are implemented.
- Reduced reliance on higher-cost external planning consultants by replacing reactive consultant support with temporary internal capacity.
- Reduced short-term operating cost pressure by offsetting the temporary role against consultant expenditure, rather than adding capacity on top of the existing cost base.
- Lower total cost over time by using the temporary capacity strategy to reduce rework, improve assessment efficiency and absorb future natural attrition where service levels can be maintained.
- Increased effective capacity within the existing workforce by creating more room for coaching, quality review, process improvement and knowledge transfer.
- Improved ability to implement the report recommendations, including reducing rework, improving application quality, strengthening triage, standardising assessment guides, improving quality controls and reducing avoidable RFLs.
- Better preparation for the Tasmanian Planning Scheme transition by focusing the next 12 months on process, framework and capability foundations that will remain relevant under the new scheme.
- Improved readiness for digital and AI-enabled planning tools by creating the capacity required to support implementation, governance, training and adoption.
- A more stable, internally capable and lower-cost planning workforce, moving Council away from a reactive consultant-supported model.

2. Clarify the Operating Model, Accountabilities and Business Continuity Arrangements

Staff feedback indicates that when the function has come under sustained workload pressure in the past, role boundaries and leadership structures have become difficult to maintain, with Team Leaders and experienced staff drawn back into direct assessment work to preserve short-term throughput.

While this may temporarily increase assessment capacity, it can reduce the time available for supervision, coaching, onboarding, quality review, knowledge management and process improvement. Over time, this can contribute to an underdeveloped workforce, inconsistent direction, greater reliance on key individuals and less efficient assessment practices.

The department should therefore clarify the intended role of each key function within the Planning operating model as follows:

Manager

Responsible for overall leadership, governance and strategic management of the Planning function, including:

- Strategic and annual planning,
- Operating model design and efficiency,
- Budget, resource management and workforce planning,
- Corporate governance,
- Customer experience delivery,
- Executive reporting,
- Interdepartmental coordination,
- Political liaison and complaints management,
- Workplace health and safety oversight, and
- Management of operational and relevant organisational risk.

Planning Coordinator

Responsible for day-to-day operational coordination, performance and knowledge management. Key responsibilities should include:

- Monitoring and reporting weekly on KPIs,
- Allocating planning applications to planners,
- Monitoring assessment timeframes, shrinkage and workload distribution across the team,
- Balancing workloads and coordinating the transfer of applications between planners where required,
- Ensuring daily resourcing of the Duty Planner function,
- Forecasting seasonal demand and supporting the development of leave quota models,

- Coordinating operational improvements where workflow bottlenecks or referral delays are identified,
- Reviewing and maintaining knowledge base materials, templates, standard text and website content,
- Reviewing and maintaining customer-facing information to improve application quality, consistency and reduce avoidable assessment effort, and
- Coordinating appeal readiness, including identifying relevant expert witnesses and ensuring required application, assessment and supporting material is available.

Team Leaders

Responsible for the supervision, development and management of planning staff. Key responsibilities should include:

- Management of individual staff KPIs and performance,
- Management and approval of individual leave,
- Identification of training gaps and support of development needs,
- Onboarding and development of new staff,
- Quality control and assessment approvals including assessment reports and RFIs,
- Ensuring compliance with workplace health and safety processes,
- Acting as an expert witness where appropriate, and
- Covering the Planning Coordinator role as required (business continuity).

Senior Planners

Key responsibilities should include:

- Aligning development application assessment with statutory requirements and agreed internal assessment guides,
- Processing complex and standard development applications,
- Mentoring and supporting Planners as required,
- Acting as an expert witness where appropriate, and
- Covering the Team Leader role as required (business continuity).

Planners

Key responsibilities should include:

- Aligning development application assessment with statutory requirements and agreed internal assessment guides,
- Processing standard development applications and more complex applications from time to time, and
- Acting as an expert witness where appropriate.

Planning Support

Planning Support should provide administrative and non-technical support across the planning application lifecycle. Key responsibilities should include:

- Reviewing all key application details and document capture
- Identifying and initiating internal and external referrals in accordance with agreed assessment guides,
- Preparing and issuing approved correspondence, including acknowledgement letters, invoice reminders, RFIs, and permits and refusal letters,
- Assisting with follow-up of unpaid, inactive or administratively incomplete applications in accordance with agreed procedures, and
- Coordinating advertising activities including neighbour letters, website notices, newspaper notices, posting of site notices and related record updates.

Duty Planner

The Duty Planner function should be rostered daily and resourced as a defined operational role. This role should provide a consistent front-line technical planning function for preliminary assessment and customer support activity, while protecting assessment planners from ad hoc interruptions. Key responsibilities should include:

- Completing preliminary assessments,
- Resolving general planning email enquiries, and
- Providing technical planning advice for customer support bookings.

In addition to clarifying role accountabilities, Council should review internal delegation levels and escalation triggers that are documented for high-risk, precedent-setting, disputed, significantly delayed or repeatedly reworked matters. This will help reduce informal decision-making, improve consistency, protect staff from unclear decision ownership and provide a clearer pathway for resolving matters that cannot be efficiently addressed through standard assessment processes.

Benefit

- Clearer role accountabilities across functions.
- Protection of capacity for onboarding, staff development, quality review and assessment oversight.
- Improved long-term workforce capability, efficiency and resilience.
- Improved day-to-day operational visibility and control.
- Stronger technical knowledge management.
- Improved business continuity.

3. Establish Agreed Operational Success Metrics and Performance Reporting

The Development Services Department should establish a clear set of agreed operational success metrics for the Planning function and introduce a regular performance reporting rhythm to ensure these measures are visible, understood and actively managed across the team.

At present, the Planning function does not appear to have a consistent set of agreed operational success measures that are clearly communicated, routinely monitored and used to guide day-to-day management decisions. As a result, service performance, workload pressure, capacity constraints, quality issues and customer experience outcomes may not be visible early enough to support proactive intervention. This contributes to a more reactive operating environment and increases the likelihood of inconsistent or unpredictable outcomes.

The recommendations throughout this report identify a range of operational measures that should be progressively adopted, including statutory timeframe performance, internal buffer targets, RFI issue timing, RFI approval quality, referral SLA performance, assessment report completion timeframes, workload distribution, shrinkage and customer enquiry volumes. These measures should be consolidated into a single Planning performance framework rather than managed as isolated improvement actions.

The agreed measures should be communicated clearly to the whole team so that staff understand what success looks like, why each measure matters and how it supports improved customer experience, statutory compliance, workload management and staff sustainability. Measures should be used initially to build visibility, identify bottlenecks and support improvement, rather than as punitive individual performance controls.

The Planning Coordinator should maintain regular operational reporting, with key metrics reviewed through an agreed management rhythm by the Director, Manager, Team Leaders and relevant operational roles. Trends, exceptions and recurring issues should be used to inform workload balancing, coaching, resourcing decisions, process improvement priorities, business rule updates and escalation where required.

Over time, once baseline performance has stabilised, Council may consider adopting selected measures as departmental KPIs and, where appropriate, individual performance indicators. These should be applied carefully and interpreted in context, including application complexity, workload, leave, referral dependency and statutory risk.

Benefit

- Clearer definition of operational success for the Planning function.
- Improved visibility of workload, capacity, quality, timeliness and customer service performance.
- Stronger ability to identify emerging issues before they become service failures.
- Improved team alignment by making performance expectations visible and consistently communicated.
- Better support for workload balancing, coaching, resourcing and process improvement decisions.
- Reduced reliance on individual knowledge to identify performance issues or bottlenecks.
- Stronger accountability for implementing and sustaining the recommendations in this report.
- More predictable service outcomes for applicants, staff, management and Council.

4. Investigate AI-Enabled Planning Assessment Support During the Tasmanian Planning Scheme Transition

Council should use the Tasmanian Planning Scheme transition period to investigate, prepare and test AI-enabled planning assessment support tools that could improve application quality, reduce manual assessment effort and support more consistent planning interpretation once the new scheme is implemented.

Section 9 identifies that the transition to the Tasmanian Planning Scheme will create a significant change point for customers, staff and systems, and an opportunity to redesign customer journeys, forms, advice pathways and digital tools around the future planning framework. It also notes that Huon Valley Council has commenced trialling AI-enabled planning tools aligned to the Tasmanian Planning Scheme, including tools that can support initial assessment of application material against planning scheme requirements and in-house assessment guides.

Rather than waiting until Kingborough has fully transitioned to the Tasmanian Planning Scheme before commencing AI readiness work, Council should use the transition period to explore technology options, assess governance requirements, identify potential partner councils and begin preparing the source material needed to train, configure or validate an AI-enabled planning support capability.

This could include working with councils already operating under the Tasmanian Planning Scheme to understand platform options, review training data requirements and source material, test use cases and identify opportunities for shared development, shared procurement or shared learning.

The initial focus should be on decision-support and efficiency, not automated decision-making. Potential use cases could include application completeness checking, surfacing relevant planning scheme provisions, identifying likely information gaps, supporting plain-language customer guidance and assisting planners to navigate approved internal assessment guides. Any future capability should retain planner verification, approved source content, clear governance controls, escalation pathways and regular quality review.

This recommendation should be aligned with the proposed internal assessment guides work, customer information improvements and digital service recommendations outlined within this report, as these would also provide the source material needed to train, configure or validate future AI-enabled planning tools.

Benefit

- Uses the Tasmanian Planning Scheme transition period proactively rather than waiting until after implementation to commence AI readiness work.
- Reduces the risk of duplicating effort by learning from councils already operating under the Tasmanian Planning Scheme.
- Creates opportunities for partnership, shared development, shared procurement or review of existing training approaches with other councils.
- Supports future reductions in manual assessment effort by preparing assessment guides, templates and guidance in a format that can support AI-assisted tools.
- Maintains statutory integrity by positioning AI as a decision-support tool subject to planner verification, rather than a substitute for professional assessment.
- Supports Kingborough's broader Digital Strategy.

11. Pre-Application

Planning Application Research

Process Objective

Ensure applicants have a clear understanding of the planning requirements, documentation expectations, process steps and likely timeframes relevant to their proposal before lodging an application. This supports better-informed applicants, improves application quality and completeness, and reduces avoidable enquiries, requests for further information and assessment delays.

Relevant Insights

- Customers are either not using the website or are unable to easily find the information.
- The current website does not effectively support first-time applicants.
- Information is available but difficult to navigate.
- Customers are not consistently guided through the planning process.
- Limited transparency contributes to customer frustration.
- The website appears to function primarily as an information repository rather than a customer service platform.
- Kingborough's Digital Strategy outlines a desire to develop their digital channel as the front door for all services and interactions as well as advocating for the use of data and AI responsibly to improve efficiency.

Summary

The Development section of the website contains a significant amount of useful regulatory and planning information, however, from a customer perspective, the information is not consistently presented in a way that supports common tasks, particularly for customers with limited familiarity with the planning system.

The current structure requires customers to navigate planning terminology, multiple information layers and document-based content before determining what requirements apply to their proposal or what action they should take next. Anecdotal feedback from Customer Service indicates that customers are either not using the website or are unable to locate the information they need, suggesting that the current digital channel is not consistently enabling effective self-service.

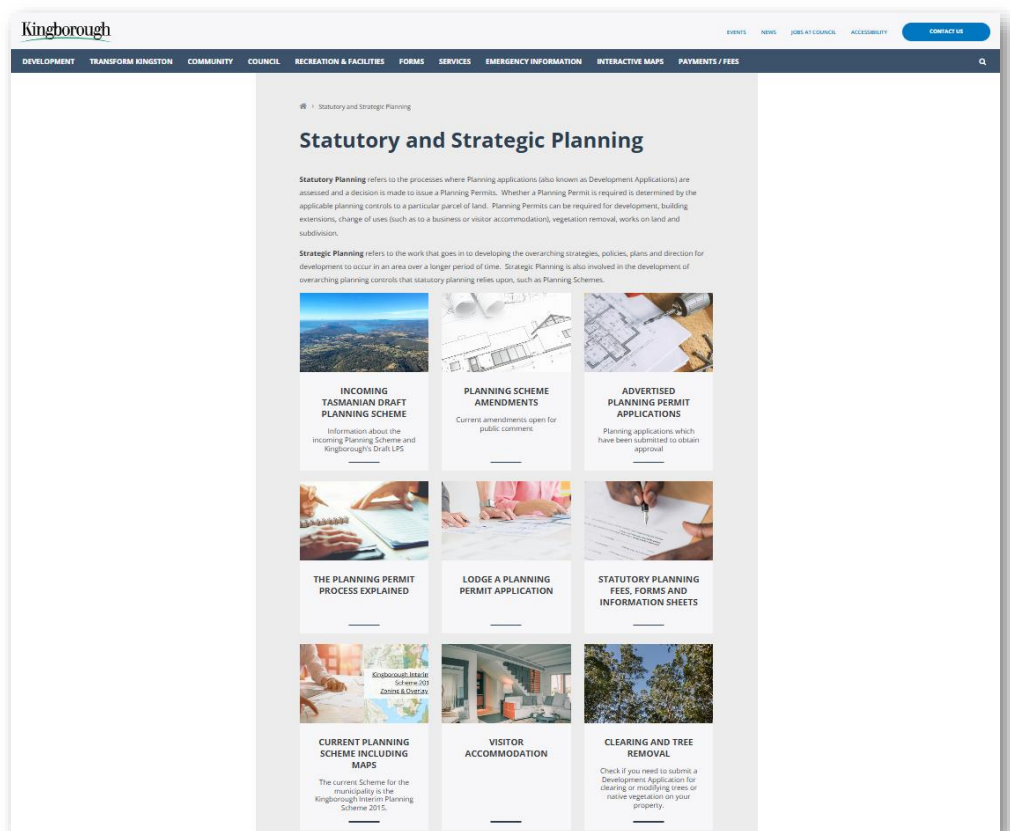
Improving the accessibility, structure and guidance provided during this pre-application step would assist customers to better understand planning requirements before lodging an application or seeking advice, thus removing any surprises. This is expected to improve application preparedness, reduce avoidable clarification enquiries and support planning staff to focus more capacity on assessment and higher-value customer interactions, in turn reducing delays, cost and customer dissatisfaction.

Recommendations

5. Re-organise Kingborough Development Website Content Around Customer Tasks

Restructure the planning website around customer objectives rather than internal planning functions, initially focusing on the most common enquiries from first-time applicants, property owners and small business operators (most likely users). The primary navigation and page hierarchy should prioritise the tasks customers are most likely trying to complete, such as *"Build or Extend a Home"*, *"Build a Shed"*, *"Subdivide Land"*, *"Remove Vegetation"* etc, enabling users to quickly identify the information, requirements and processes relevant to their needs.

Administrative, strategic and technical content should remain available, but should be clearly separated from the primary customer pathways and given secondary focus within the site structure. This would include planning policy, strategic projects, planning scheme updates, advertised development applications and technical reference material. Separating this content would ensure specialist users, consultants and interested stakeholders can continue to access statutory and strategic planning information without distracting or overwhelming everyday customers seeking to complete a specific planning task.



(Figure 5 – Current Kingborough Council Planning Home Page)

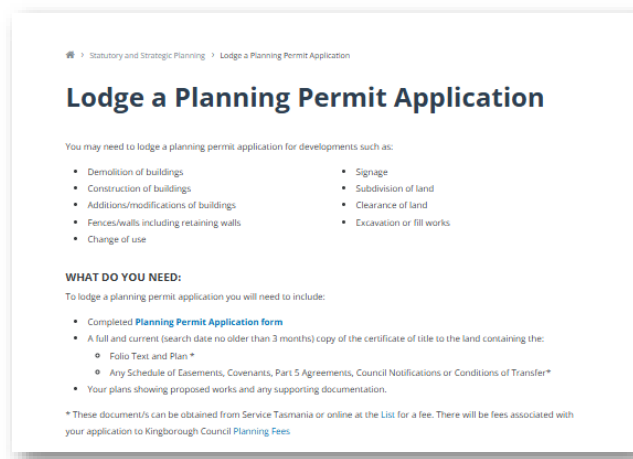
Benefit

- Improved customer experience by making planning information easier to find and navigate.
- Reduced navigation complexity by organising content around common customer tasks rather than internal Council functions.
- Improved accessibility and convenience by enabling customers to access relevant planning information online at any time.
- Increased customer self-service, particularly for routine enquiries from first-time applicants, property owners and small business operators.
- Reduced demand on phone, email and counter enquiry channels by helping customers find answers online.
- Improved ability for planning staff to focus on assessment activities and higher-value customer interactions.

6. [Introduce Guided Customer Journeys to the Kingborough Development Website](#)

For each customer task, develop a step-by-step planning pathway that guides customers through the end-to-end process before progressing to application submission. Each pathway should incorporate simple decision-tree style questions that progressively guide customers based on their specific circumstances, including determining whether approval is required, identifying applicable zoning and overlay controls, outlining documentation requirements with examples, providing indicative assessment timeframes and fees, highlighting key considerations relevant to the proposal, if required booking a meeting for further planner advice and ultimately directing customers to the appropriate application form.

The current site hints that a planning application *may* be needed for certain circumstances but then expects the applicant to navigate a complex set of planning reference documents in order to understand their obligations, while presenting the planning form as a primary link.



(Figure 6 –Lodge a Planning Permit Application)

Benefit

- Reduced requests for further information by helping applicants understand documentation requirements before they apply.
- Faster and more efficient assessments through better-prepared applications and clearer upfront guidance.
- Reduced processing delays caused by missing information, unclear proposal details or avoidable applicant errors.
- Improved customer expectations by explaining approval requirements, likely process steps, timeframes, fees and key considerations earlier in the journey.
- Reduced avoidable phone, email and counter enquiries by providing clearer online guidance before customers seek planner advice.

7. Simplify Online Language and Reduce Planning Jargon

Review site content to minimise the use of technical planning terminology and internal planning language wherever possible, replacing it with plain-English descriptions that are easily understood by the residents, property owners and small business operators most likely to be using the site. Only where specialist terminology is required for statutory or legislative reasons should it be used together with clear explanations, examples and contextual guidance to help customers understand what the term means and why it is relevant to their situation.

For example, the first information presented to customers when selecting the Development section introduces concepts such as "Statutory Planning" and "Strategic Planning" (see figure 5), despite these distinctions not being necessary for most users to achieve their objective. This reflects the internal structure of the planning function rather than the way customers think about their needs. Replacing headings such as "Statutory Planning" with "Planning

Applications and Approvals" would better align with customer expectations. Additional opportunities include explaining terms such as "Local Provisions Schedule", "Discretionary Application" and "Code Overlay" in plain language, and incorporating hover-over definitions, FAQs and information boxes throughout the customer journey. Content should be written on the assumption that users have little or no prior knowledge of the planning system.

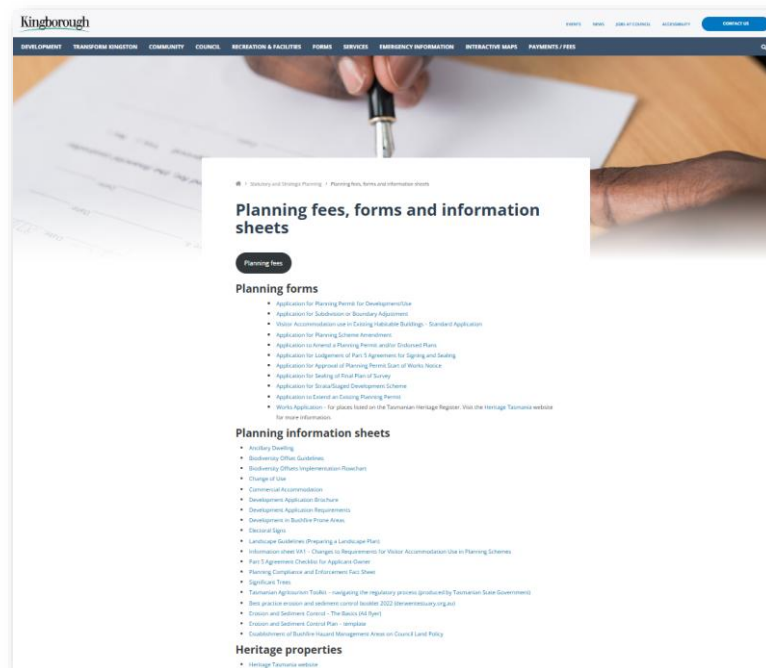
Benefit

- Greater customer confidence when preparing and lodging applications.
- Fewer clarification enquiries to planning staff.
- Improved application quality through clearer explanation of requirements.
- Reduced avoidable delays caused by misunderstanding or incomplete information.

8. Improve Planning Webpage Information Layout and Navigation

Review the layout and presentation of planning content to better align with contemporary website design principles and improve usability. Rationalise the number of links, documents and content layers presented on individual pages, grouping related information into logical categories and presenting content progressively to reduce information overload and improve readability.

For example, several pages currently contain long lists of links, documents and planning information presented with little visual distinction between high-priority actions and supporting reference material (<https://www.kingborough.tas.gov.au/development/planning-forms/>). Opportunities exist to introduce content cards, expandable sections, visual grouping, clear headings and improved page hierarchy to help customers quickly identify relevant information and navigate to the next step. Content should prioritise key customer actions and decisions while reducing unnecessary clutter and distractions.



(Figure 7 – Planning Fees, forms and information sheets)

Benefit

- Improved customer experience through clearer webpage structure and navigation.
- Reduced information overload for applicants.
- Increased customer self-service through clearer online pathways.
- Fewer routine enquiries to planning staff.
- Improved application quality by making key requirements easier to identify.
- Reduced avoidable delays caused by customers missing or misunderstanding information.

9. Establish a Customer Journey Governance and Continuous Improvement Process

Establish an ongoing process to review, maintain and enhance customer journeys based on customer feedback, website analytics, enquiry trends and changes to planning legislation, policies and processes. This should include clear ownership of customer-facing content, regular review cycles and a mechanism for identifying and prioritising new customer journeys as common enquiry types emerge.

For example, analysis of website search terms, unsuccessful searches and customer journey completion and drop-off rates, volume and category of pre-application enquiries, quality control assessments of frequently missing documentation at lodgement, direct customer feedback and application trends could be used to identify areas where customers continue to experience confusion or where additional guided pathways may be beneficial. This would ensure customer journeys remain relevant, accurate and aligned with changing customer needs and business requirements over time.

Benefit

- Sustained improvement in customer experience over time.
- Clear ownership and accountability for customer-facing planning content.
- Reduced routine enquiries.
- Improved application quality by identifying and addressing frequently missing or misunderstood requirements.

10. Develop an AI-Enabled Planning Information Assistant Aligned to the Incoming Tasmanian Planning Scheme

Similar to what has already been deployed at [Huon Valley Council](#), investigate the development of an online AI-enabled planning information assistant (chat bot) to support customers with any pre-lodgement enquiries. The assistant should provide customers with accessible, plain-language guidance on common planning questions, approval pathways, process steps, documentation expectations and if required offer options to book an appointment for further assistance.

The development approach should be aligned to the incoming Tasmanian Planning Scheme, using the current transition period to assess technology options, establish governance and risk controls, train the model on customer enquiry scenarios, prepare plain-language source content and undertake testing so that the capability is positioned for implementation once the new planning framework and support mapping are finalised.

Appropriate controls should include the use of approved source information, clear disclaimers, referral to planning staff for complex or high-risk enquiries, monitoring of responses, regular content review and reporting on enquiry themes to inform further service improvements.

Benefit

- Immediate, accessible support for common planning enquiries, including outside standard service hours.
- Improved customer understanding of approval pathways, process steps and documentation requirements.
- Increased customer self-service for routine pre-lodgement questions.
- Reduced routine phone and email enquiries to planning staff.
- Improved application quality through clearer upfront guidance.
- Stronger alignment with Kingborough's Digital Strategy and future Tasmanian Planning Scheme transition.
- More efficient use of planning resources by keeping staff focused on assessment activities and higher-value customer interactions.

Pre-lodgement Enquiries

Process Objective

Provide applicants with timely, accessible and appropriate advice before lodgement, enabling them to better understand the planning process, likely requirements, documentation expectations and appropriate next steps relevant to their proposal. Ensure enquiries and advice are consistently triaged, recorded, monitored and escalated where necessary, while making clear that any preliminary advice remains subject to formal assessment once an application is lodged.

Relevant Insights

- External feedback indicates difficulty accessing timely and practical pre-lodgement advice, with response times and communication perceived as slow.
- Inconsistent advice and limited continuity between pre-lodgement discussions and subsequent assessment RFI's is reducing customer confidence and contributing to frustration.
- Pre-lodgement engagement is not consistently perceived as adding sufficient value for complex proposals, with stakeholders reporting that early advice may reiterate general requirements without clearly identifying key risks, practical pathways or likely information expectations.
- High volumes of basic or repetitive enquiries, including general enquiries from prospective purchasers, consume available planning advice capacity.
- Significant or complex pre-lodgement proposals rely on informal relationships or backchannels to access appropriately experienced advice, creating potential consistency, transparency and equity concerns.
- Limited reporting across phone, email and walk-in enquiry channels reduces visibility of enquiry volumes, outstanding requests, response performance and future resource requirements.
- Limited analysis of enquiry types and recurring customer issues reduces Council's ability to improve self-service resources and proactively address avoidable customer demand.
- Limited monitoring of pre-lodgement response standards (service levels) restricts Council's ability to identify service delays, manage customer expectations and address the repeat contact concerns raised through external feedback.
- In an effort to manage resource demand, In-Person technical support has been restricted to 2 hours a day between 1:30-3:30pm. Outside of this, customers must either call or email.
- Kingborough needs to maintain assisted and non-digital pathways for customers with limited digital access or low digital confidence.
- Kingborough would like to support a centralised customer support model but need to separate non-technical navigation support from technical planning advice.

Summary

The Pre-Lodgement process provides an important customer support function by enabling applicants to seek advice before committing to a formal development application. However, the current process appears to operate through a largely reactive service model that is dependent on staff availability, manual routing, individual judgement and informal escalation.

The process map identifies several different customer entry points, including phone, email and in-person enquiries, with Customer Service, Records and the PTO role each involved in receiving, recording or responding to requests. While this provides multiple channels for customers to seek assistance, the problem statements indicate limited end-to-end visibility of enquiry demand, response performance, escalation pathways and customer outcomes.

Overall, there is an opportunity to establish a more clearly defined and actively managed pre-lodgement advice service that expands customer access, differentiates enquiry types, sets appropriate service expectations, directs technical effort to matters where it adds the most value, and provides Council with better visibility of demand, service performance and recurring customer issues.

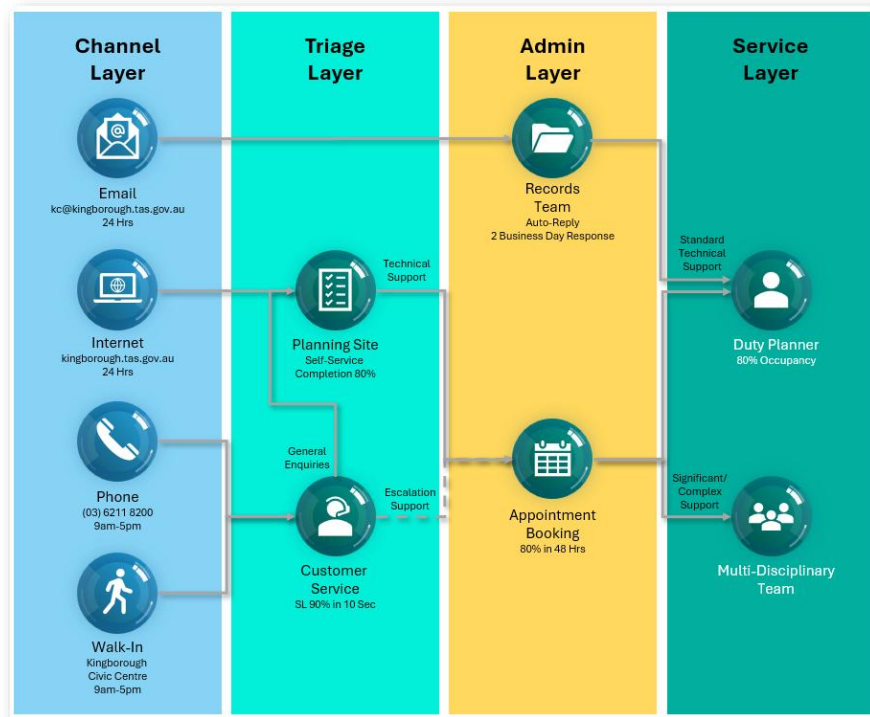
Recommendations

11. [Establish a Defined Pre-Lodgement Service Model](#)

Pre-lodgement enquiries are currently not clearly differentiated by enquiry type, complexity or the level of professional judgement required. As a result, basic information requests, standard planning advice, complex technical enquiries and significant development proposals can enter the service through similar channels, creating inconsistent customer experience, inefficient use of specialist planning capacity and unclear expectations about what advice can be provided, by whom and within what timeframe.

Council should therefore develop a clearly defined service model for pre-lodgement enquiries that differentiates between general information requests, standard planning advice, complex technical enquiries and significant development proposals. Each service level should define the appropriate channel, responsible role, expected advice scope, target response timeframe and escalation requirements.

For example, basic process or general information enquiries (email, phone, walk-ins) are directed initially through improved digital self-service channels with further assistance managed through bookable planner support. Complex or significant proposals may require a scheduled planner-led, multidisciplinary pre-lodgement engagement.



(Figure 8 – Example High-Level Pre-Lodgement Service Model)

Benefit

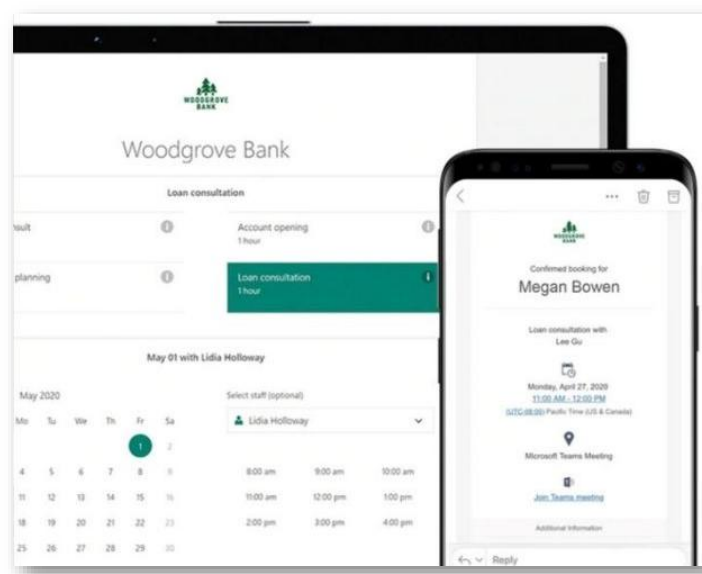
- More consistent triage of pre-lodgement enquiries based on complexity and urgency.
- Improved customer access to the right level of advice at the right time.
- Clearer expectations for customers regarding advice scope, channels and response timeframes.
- Better use of specialist planning capacity by directing basic enquiries to self-service or lower-complexity support pathways.
- Improved support for complex or significant proposals through scheduled, planner-led engagement.
- Reduced inconsistency in how pre-lodgement advice is requested, managed and delivered.
- Stronger alignment with Kingborough's Digital Strategy and future customer service model.
- Improved customer experience through clearer, more structured and more predictable pre-lodgement support.

12. Implement Managed Appointment Scheduling for Pre-Lodgement Advice

Requests for pre-lodgement support, including calls and walk-ins, are currently managed largely on an ad hoc basis. This creates peaks and valleys in demand and is presently managed through return call requests where calls are unanswered, and by restricting face-to-face access to a 1:30pm–3:30pm service window. This limits customer access and, without structured reporting, makes it difficult for the department to understand enquiry volumes, complexity or resourcing requirements. Limited reporting on enquiry subjects also reduces Council’s ability to identify recurring customer issues and update self-service resources, guidance material or online customer journeys to reduce avoidable future demand.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Development Services Department extend the existing Planning “Support Desk” hours and implement an appointment scheduling process, using an existing platform such as Microsoft Bookings (note this is already licensed as part of Council’s current O365 environment), to better manage customer access to pre-lodgement advice and align service availability with available planning resources. The booking process should provide customers with visibility of available appointment times across business hours and appropriate service options including calls, online video conference (not currently an option), or in-person meeting, while enabling Council to allocate defined capacity.

The booking option should be incorporated into online customer journeys where a proposed development is identified as complex, non-standard or likely to require tailored advice before lodgement. It should also be utilised by Customer Service staff, enabling them to book an available appointment on behalf of customers who call or attend in person, rather than relying on ad hoc availability.



(Figure 9 – Example Microsoft Bookings Client Interface)

Benefit

- Improved customer access to pre-lodgement advice through visible appointment availability and expanded service options.
- Clearer service expectations for customers, including appointment type, timing and advice pathway.
- Better management of planning advice capacity by allowing Council to define, protect and allocate available support time.
- Reduced reliance on ad hoc call-backs, walk-ins and restricted face-to-face service windows.
- Reduced interruptions to assessment work by funnelling enquiries through a structured booking process.
- Better matching of enquiry complexity to the appropriate planning resource.
- Improved access to digital meeting options, including Teams-based appointments.
- Improved visibility of enquiry volumes, appointment types, complexity and resource utilisation.
- Stronger reporting on recurring enquiry themes to inform website content, customer journeys and self-service improvements.
- Better workforce and service planning through clearer data on pre-lodgement demand.

13. Establish Customer Service as a Centralised Digital Navigation Support Channel

As part of a centralised customer support model, enable Customer Service staff to act as the primary navigation and access point for customers seeking non-technical planning information and pre-lodgement support. Customer Service should be equipped to direct and help customers locate and use relevant online planning resources, including guided customer journeys and to book further pre-lodgement advice where technical input is required, while maintaining a clear boundary that technical planning interpretation and advice remains the responsibility of appropriately qualified planning staff.

For customers with limited access to internet resources, low digital confidence or accessibility barriers, provide access to customer-facing terminals/kiosks within the Civic Centre that enables them to access online council resources. Where customers are unable to independently use the online pathway, Customer Service staff should be able to assist them to navigate the available resources or book an appropriate available appointment on their behalf through the managed booking system.

This recommendation should be implemented in alignment with Council's Digital Strategy, supporting the transition toward more accessible, customer-centred and digitally enabled services. It should also form part of a broader centralised customer support model that provides customers with a consistent and guided entry point to all Council services.

Benefit

- Improved customer access to planning information and support pathways.
- Clearer and more consistent first point of contact for planning enquiries.
- Better support for customers with limited internet access, low digital confidence or accessibility barriers.
- Increased use of online planning resources, guided customer journeys and self-service tools.
- Reduced reliance on direct or ad hoc access to planning staff for routine enquiries.
- Clearer separation between non-technical navigation support and qualified planning advice.
- Improved triage of customers to the right support channel or appointment type.
- More efficient use of planning resources by keeping planners focused on assessment work and higher-value customer interactions.
- Stronger alignment with Council's Digital Strategy and centralised customer support model.

14. [Email Service Expectations, Workflow Capture and Service Model Alignment](#)

Planning email enquiries are currently being used as a broad entry point for both general information requests and more specific or technical planning questions. This can create customer expectations that complex matters will be resolved through written email correspondence, resulting in extended back-and-forth communication, delayed responses, incomplete context and reduced visibility of total enquiry demand. Email should instead be aligned to the defined pre-lodgement service model, with general enquiries answered through links to approved information and more complex or site-specific matters directed through an appropriate appointment through the online channel.

Council should review and update the email enquiry process for planning enquiries to ensure customer expectations, internal workflow management and record capture are aligned. The current service level for email responses is understood to be 10 business days, however, this is not clearly communicated to customers and appears excessive where the intended service response is to provide general information, direct customers to online resources or advise the next step for obtaining further support.

Council should establish and communicate a clearer email service standard for general planning enquiries, with a recommended target of providing a response within two business days. This should be communicated through the auto-reply receipt and should clarify that email responses are intended to provide general information, direct customers to relevant online guidance, and explain how to book pre-lodgement support where additional, technical or site-specific advice is required.

The email workflow should also be reviewed to ensure all inbound customer correspondence and subsequent replies are consistently captured and measurable. Currently, emails received through the main Council email address are logged as ECM requests and then forwarded to the planning enquiries mailbox for response. However, where responses are sent from the planning enquiries mailbox and the customer replies directly to that address, there is a risk that follow-up correspondence is not consistently logged in ECM, reducing visibility of total email volumes, response times and outstanding actions.

Council should either define a clear manual process for staff to log all planning enquiries mailbox responses and customer replies into ECM or preferably configure the workflow, so customer responses are routed back through the main Council email pathway. Options may include sending responses from the main Council address, using an approved alias or establishing an auto-forwarding rule.

Benefit

- Faster response to general planning enquiries through a defined two-business-day service standard.
- Reduced customer uncertainty, repeat follow-up emails and phone calls.
- Better routing of complex, technical or site-specific enquiries to the appropriate pre-lodgement advice pathway.
- Improved alignment between email enquiries, online customer journeys and the defined pre-lodgement service model.
- More consistent capture of planning email enquiries, responses and follow-up correspondence.
- Better reporting on planning enquiry demand to support resource planning and service improvement.
- More efficient use of planning resources by directing routine enquiries to approved information and reserving planner time for higher-value technical advice.

15. Establish Pre-Lodgement Service Standards and Performance KPIs

Once structured enquiry and booking processes are in place, Council should establish clear service standards and performance indicators for pre-lodgement support. Current performance is difficult to manage consistently because expected response times, service levels, appointment availability and resolution outcomes are not clearly baselined, measured or reported across the service model.

Council should baseline current performance and introduce clear service standards for pre-lodgement enquiries, supported by regular reporting at both management and individual level. These standards should be used to manage responsiveness, service accessibility, workload allocation, customer expectations and the effective use of planning resources.

Example measures may include:

- Management Level:
 - X% of online enquiries proceed to submission without need to book further support (measures self-service effectiveness)
 - X% of appointments booked within Y hrs (measures resource demand and accessibility of support)
 - Duty Planner Occupancy 75-80% for handling preliminary assessments, emails, and appointments (measures support capacity)
- Individual Level:
 - X% of emails responded to within 2 business days (measures responsiveness)
 - X% first contact resolution rate (FCR) (measures service efficiency at resolving queries)

Performance reporting should be used to identify bottlenecks, capacity shortfalls, training needs and recurring customer issues. Targets should be introduced progressively after a baseline period to ensure they are realistic, meaningful and aligned to the complexity of enquiries being managed.

Benefit

- Clearer service expectations for pre-lodgement enquiries and advice.
- Improved transparency and accountability in how enquiries are managed.
- Better visibility of response times, appointment availability and service demand.
- Improved ability to monitor workload, support capacity and resource utilisation.
- Stronger alignment between customer demand and available planning resources.
- Earlier identification of bottlenecks, capacity gaps, training needs and recurring customer issues.
- Improved customer experience through more consistent and predictable service delivery.
- Stronger management reporting to support continuous improvement over time.

16. Establish a Formal Pre-Lodgement Pathway for Significant or Complex Developments

Significant, complex or strategically important development proposals often require early coordination across planning, referrals, infrastructure and other technical areas. Where there is no clearly defined pathway for this type of pre-lodgement engagement, access to advice can become reliant on informal relationships, ad hoc escalation or individual staff availability. This creates risks around transparency, consistency, stakeholder management and early identification of material planning or infrastructure issues.

Introduce a defined pre-lodgement engagement pathway for significant, complex or strategically important development proposals, managed through the proposed booking system. The booking pathway should include a specific service category for complex or significant development matters, with clear eligibility criteria, required pre-meeting documentation, meeting structure, relevant technical participants, advice record requirements and escalation pathways.

This would provide applicants with a transparent and equitable way to request coordinated early advice, while enabling Council to control availability, allocate the appropriate planning and technical resources, capture demand data and ensure the engagement is managed consistently rather than through informal relationships or ad hoc access to staff.

Where appropriate, Council could consider a fee-for-service arrangement for resource-intensive pre-lodgement support. Any fee model should be carefully designed to recover the cost of additional pre-lodgement support rather than provide preferential treatment or prioritised statutory assessment outcomes. Eligibility, service inclusions, limitations and response timeframes should be clearly defined to ensure fairness, transparency and continued access to basic planning advice for residents and smaller applicants.

Benefit

- Improved transparency and fairness in access to pre-lodgement advice for significant or complex developments.
- Clearer eligibility criteria, service expectations and advice pathways for major applicants and consultants.
- Earlier identification of material planning, referral, infrastructure and documentation issues.
- Improved quality of applications lodged following complex pre-lodgement engagement.
- Reduced downstream delays, RFIs, rework and conflict during formal assessment.
- Better coordination across planning, referral, infrastructure and technical teams.

- Reduced governance risk associated with informal relationships, ad hoc escalation or inconsistent access to staff.
- Improved stakeholder management for complex, sensitive or strategically important proposals.
- Better visibility of demand for significant pre-lodgement support and associated resourcing impacts.
- Potential cost recovery for resource-intensive advice, while preserving equitable access to basic planning support.

17. [AI-Enabled Voice Service for Routine Pre-Lodgement Enquiries](#)

In alignment with [Recommendation 10](#), extend the capability of an AI pre-lodgement bot to a voice-call service for routine pre-lodgement enquiries. With a web-based platform already enabled, this type of service would require only minimal additional infrastructure and would provide customers with an accessible telephone-based channel to obtain general planning process information and navigate common approval and documentation questions without the need for any behaviour or educational change.

Where a customer's enquiry involves interpretation of planning controls, site-specific advice, uncertainty, complex development matters or a request for confirmation of an approval pathway, the voice service should clearly identify its limitations and assist the customer in scheduling a planning advice appointment.

Benefit

- Improved 24-hour access to routine pre-lodgement information through a telephone-based channel.
- Better support for customers who prefer phone contact, have limited digital confidence or cannot easily use online resources.
- Increased customer self-service without requiring customers to change their preferred contact behaviour.
- Reduced routine call demand on Customer Service and planning staff.
- Faster access to general planning process information, approval pathway guidance and documentation requirements.
- Stronger alignment between digital self-service, telephone support and the broader pre-lodgement service model.

12. Lodgement

Complete A Planning Application Form

Process Objective

Enable applicants to lodge a complete and valid Planning Permit application for development and/or use, supported by the required forms, plans, reports and supporting information necessary for Council to commence assessment efficiently and minimise avoidable delays, clarification requests or requests for further information.

Relevant Insights

- Applications may be regulatorily acceptable at lodgement despite not consistently meeting the practical information standard required to support efficient assessment, resulting in additional information being sought through RFIs and contributing to avoidable delays and rework.
- Applicants are not always clear on the information, documentation and supporting material required when submitting a planning application, increasing the likelihood of incomplete or poor-quality lodgements.
- Basic application deficiencies are not always identified at the point of lodgement, including missing title documentation and/or general manager consent, resulting in avoidable follow-up and delayed progression to assessment.
- Once an application is lodged, applicants have limited ability to self-serve information about application status, outstanding actions, key milestones or next steps, increasing reliance on phone calls, emails and manual updates.
- Council's Digital Strategy supports a more consistent Digital Front Door, digitised forms and approvals, real-time service tracking and improved customer communication.

Summary

The lodgement step is intended to ensure that a planning application is submitted with the information required to support efficient assessment. However, applications may be technically receivable while still lacking the plans, consents or supporting material needed to assess them efficiently. This can result in avoidable follow-up, administrative rework and requests for additional information.

There is also limited customer visibility after lodgement, with applicants relying on phone calls, emails or manual updates to understand application status, outstanding actions and next steps.

This creates an opportunity to strengthen lodgement through improved application guidance, a digital application form integrated with guided customer journeys, and a future digital customer portal that supports application tracking, document exchange and clearer communication throughout the assessment lifecycle.

Recommendations

18. [Strengthen Visibility of Application Information Requirements and Expectations at Lodgement](#)

While Council is required to accept planning applications that meet the statutory minimum lodgement requirements, the current form includes broader application information requirements after the applicant declaration and signature section, which may reduce their visibility and perceived importance.

Reposition the “Requirements for Submitting this Application” section before the applicant declaration and signature section so applicants are more clearly prompted to consider whether they have provided the plans, documents, consents and supporting material likely to be required for assessment.

The existing note on the form already advises applicants that the listed information is provided as a minimum and that additional information may be requested to assess the application against the relevant standards of the Scheme. This should be strengthened to clearly explain the practical consequence of not providing relevant supporting information. In particular, the form should advise applicants that incomplete or missing supporting information may require further follow-up or requests for additional information and may limit Council’s ability to assess the application as efficiently as possible. This would help set clearer expectations at the point of submission and encourage applicants to provide more complete information before the application enters the assessment workflow.

Benefit:

- Improved application quality by making information requirements more visible before submission.
- Clearer applicant understanding of the plans, documents, consents and supporting material likely to be required.
- Reduced avoidable follow-up caused by missing or incomplete supporting information.
- Reduced assessment delays linked to incomplete documentation.

19. [Introduce a Digital Planning Application Form](#)

Following the implementation of guided customer journeys on the planning website ([recommendation 6](#)), introduce a digital planning application form that is presented as the final lodgement step within the relevant online pathway, rather than as a standalone form. Applicants should first be guided through relevant information about approval requirements, zoning and overlays, supporting documentation, likely assessment considerations and

available pre-lodgement support before progressing to application submission.

The digital form should be tailored based on the customer journey selected and, over time, the applicant's responses, property location, applicable planning controls and type of development proposed. This would enable the form to provide more relevant prompts, checklists, examples and document upload fields, including where additional consents, reports or supporting material may be required with links to relevant guidance.

The digital form should include upfront quality control checks at the point of submission, including mandatory fields for statutory minimum lodgement information such as, certificate of title information, applicant details, proposal description and estimated cost of works.

While Council would continue to accept applications that meet statutory lodgement requirements, the digital form should clearly identify where additional supporting information is likely to be required for assessment if not provided upfront. It should explain that incomplete or missing supporting information may require further follow-up or requests for additional information and may limit Council's ability to assess the application as efficiently as possible.

As an initial implementation, the digital form could generate a structured lodgement email into the existing process, allowing Council to improve customer experience and information capture without requiring immediate system integration. Over time, the form should be designed to support integration with Council's electronic document and records management system and future digital workflow tools, reducing manual handling, improving data quality and supporting end-to-end application tracking.

Hard copy application support should remain available through the Civic Centre for customers who cannot access or confidently use digital services. This would ensure the digital lodgement pathway improves efficiency and customer experience while maintaining accessible alternatives for customers requiring non-digital or assisted support.

Benefit:

- Improved application quality and completeness by guiding applicants through relevant requirements before submission.
- Clearer customer expectations regarding minimum lodgement requirements and likely assessment information needs.
- Reduced avoidable follow-up, RFIs and administrative rework caused by missing or incomplete information.
- Improved data quality through mandatory fields, structured prompts, checklists and document upload requirements.

- Stronger alignment with Council's Digital Strategy, including digitised forms, approvals and a more consistent Digital Front Door.
- Improved foundation for future system integration, workflow automation and application tracking.

20. Introduce a Digital Planning Customer Portal

Once an application is lodged, applicants currently have limited ability to self-serve information about application status, outstanding actions, key milestones, correspondence or next steps. This creates uncertainty and can increase reliance on phone calls, emails and manual updates from Customer Service and planning staff. It also means document exchange, RFI responses and customer communications may occur across multiple channels rather than through a single customer-facing workflow.

Council should consider a digital planning customer portal that provides a single point of interaction for planning applicants throughout the application lifecycle. The portal should enable customers to submit applications, upload supporting documentation, respond to requests for further information, monitor application progress, receive status updates and access key correspondence and decisions in one location.

Where practical, the portal should provide visibility of key milestones within the assessment process, expected next steps and outstanding actions required from the applicant. This should include status information following lodgement, online invoice payments & receipt, RFI correspondence, advertising and assessment notices.

Benefit:

- Improved customer visibility of application status, milestones, outstanding actions and next steps.
- Fewer repeat phone calls, emails and manual status update requests.
- More consistent customer communication through a single application interaction point.
- More efficient document exchange, including supporting material, RFI responses and correspondence.
- Improved record capture by reducing reliance on multiple communication channels.
- Better customer experience through easier access to key correspondence, invoices, receipts and decisions.
- Stronger alignment with Council's Digital Strategy and future Digital Front Door model.
- Improved foundation for end-to-end digital workflow, application tracking and service reporting.

Preliminary Assessment

Process Objective

Complete an initial planning review of the lodged application to determine the application type, applicable fee, preliminary assessment pathway and any obvious referral requirements. This step ensures the application is correctly classified and documented before invoicing, allocation and progression into formal assessment.

Relevant Insights

- Staff rely on a combination of individual experience, informal knowledge sharing and ad hoc training to complete preliminary assessments.
- General procedure and work practices are not consistently documented or centrally maintained.
- Updates, reference information and procedural guidance are often distributed by email rather than maintained in a single source of truth. This requires individual staff to create their own local reference libraries, increasing the risk of version control issues, inconsistent interpretation and duplicated effort.
- Training material and practical examples have been developed as required, but are not consistently stored in a central, searchable location where they can be easily accessed, reused and updated by planners.
- Feedback indicates there is not a consistent or structured onboarding process for new staff, resulting in variation in how new planners learn the role and what information they are exposed to early.
- It takes a long time for new staff to become fully competent, with less experienced staff taking longer to become confident and relying heavily on others for support.

Summary

Preliminary assessment is an important early control point that determines how an application is classified, invoiced and progressed into the assessment workflow. However, the process is not consistently supported by centrally maintained guidance, reference material, training resources or documented work practices.

Ad hoc training has been provided when required, but this knowledge is not consistently captured in a shared location for future reference. As a result, the process relies heavily on individual planner knowledge, memory and local reference material. This creates a risk of inconsistent practice, duplicated effort, version control issues, slower onboarding and reduced efficiency, particularly for newer or less experienced staff.

While these issues are visible in the Preliminary Assessment step, they reflect a broader opportunity to improve knowledge management, onboarding and capability development across the planning function.

Recommendations

21. Establish a Centralised Departmental Knowledge Hub

Operational information, policy updates, process guidance, templates and reference materials are not consistently maintained in a single, structured location. As a result, staff may rely on email history, local files, Teams chats, individual knowledge or outdated reference material to complete work. This creates version control issues, inconsistent access to information, duplicated effort and a risk that important operational updates are missed or applied inconsistently.

It is recommended that the Development Services Department establish a centralised departmental intranet and operational knowledge hub that consolidates key planning documentation, policies, procedures, templates, reference materials, assessment guides and operational updates into a structured and searchable environment.

The hub should include a clear landing page as the primary entry point for daily operational information. This could include news articles and policy updates, planning scheme changes, relevant community updates, advertising schedules, department action registers, current templates and centralised access to key reference information.

Benefit:

- Clearer single source of truth for policies, procedures, templates, assessment guides and reference materials.
- Reduced reliance on email history, local files, Teams chats and individual knowledge.
- Improved version control for operational documents.
- Reduced duplication of effort.
- More consistent application of process guidance, assessment guides and policy updates.
- Improved communication of operational updates, planning scheme changes and departmental priorities.
- Better onboarding and knowledge transfer for new or less experienced staff.
- Reduced continuity risk where key knowledge is held by individual staff members.

22. Establish a Centralised Learning and Development Hub

Training, onboarding and reference materials are currently developed as required but are not consistently stored, indexed or reused as structured learning resources. This means staff may rely on informal knowledge transfer, ad hoc training, individual memory or locally saved material when completing key process steps. This can create inconsistent onboarding, slower time to competency, repeated training effort and a risk that staff miss important information because there is no clear learning pathway or central repository.

Establish a centralised Learning and Development hub within the intranet to store and organise recorded training sessions, onboarding material, process walkthroughs, reference examples, technical guidance and links to relevant legislation or planning scheme provisions.

Recorded training sessions should be structured as reusable learning resources, incorporating searchable transcripts, chapter indexing and, where appropriate, interactive learning components such as knowledge checks. This would allow staff to revisit specific topics quickly and support consistent interpretation of key process steps.

The Learning and Development hub should be structured around defined learning pathways for new starters and ongoing capability development for existing staff. Content should have clear ownership, version control and review cycles so training material can be updated as processes, legislation, planning scheme requirements and assessment guides change.

Benefit:

- Improved staff capability, consistency and confidence.
- Faster onboarding and time to competency for new starters.
- Clearer learning pathways for new and existing staff.
- Reduced reliance on informal knowledge transfer and individual memory.
- Reduced repeated ad hoc training effort.
- Easier access to recorded training, process walkthroughs, examples and technical guidance.
- More consistent application of planning processes, assessment guides and technical requirements.
- Improved knowledge retention through searchable transcripts, indexed content and reusable learning material.
- Stronger version control and currency of training resources as processes, legislation and planning scheme requirements change.
- Better support for continuous improvement and ongoing capability development.

Case Management Job Creation and Invoicing

Process Objective

Ensure the lodged planning application is formally registered in Council's systems, assigned a reference, linked to the relevant ECM record, and acknowledged to the applicant within the required timeframe. This step ensures the applicant is issued with the appropriate invoice for payment and that the application record is available for allocation, tracking and progression through the assessment workflow.

Relevant Insights

- Workflow management is not always consistently controlled through a single system, with staff at times relying on email as an informal notification queue.
- Reliance on hard-coded individual email accounts within system notifications has previously created service continuity risks where key staff were absent or unavailable.

Summary

The Case Management job creation and invoicing step is an important administrative control point that establishes the formal application record, reference ID, ECM linkage, invoice and starts the assessment "clock". Where notification and task management occur across both the case management system and informal email channels, there is a risk that ownership of outstanding actions becomes unclear or dependent on individual staff availability.

Recommendations

23. Establish Council's Case Management System as the Single Source of Truth for Application Tasks and Notifications

Application task management and notifications are currently supported through Council's case management system; however additional email alerts are also used to notify staff of workflow activity. This creates multiple notification channels, increases administrative noise and can make it less clear which system should be relied upon to manage outstanding actions. Where email alerts are hard coded to individual staff members, there is also a risk that actions are missed, delayed or not visible to others when staff are absent, on leave or change roles which occurred recently in Q4 2025 causing service disruptions. Where the system already provides task notifications, the use of additional email alerts should be reviewed and rationalised to avoid duplicate workflow channels.

Confirm Council's case management system as the single source of truth for managing planning application tasks and workflow notifications. If email notifications are still required to support operational awareness or business continuity, they should be directed to a role-based shared mailbox or

distribution group rather than hard-coded to individual staff members. For example, a Planning Coordinator mailbox or distribution group could be established with access provided to appropriate planning leadership staff to support coverage during leave, absences or changes in personnel.

Benefit:

- Lower administrative noise for planning staff.
- Reduced risk of missed or delayed actions caused by reliance on individual email accounts.
- Improved business continuity during staff leave, absence or role changes.
- Better visibility of outstanding tasks and workflow activity for planning leadership.
- More consistent management of application actions, escalations and follow-up.

Application Assignment

Process Objective

Allocate the application to an appropriate planner based on application type, location, complexity, previous involvement, capability and available capacity. This step ensures ownership of the application is clearly assigned, and default referral tasks are established.

Relevant Insights

- Default internal referrals are currently being created during the application assignment stage prior to any payment from the applicant. This may result in unnecessary work for internal departments.
- Referral activity is not consistently supported by agreed assessment guides that clearly identify which application types, risk triggers or site characteristics require technical input from Environmental Health or Plumbing.
- Internal referral teams can experience pressure to prioritise planning referrals because of statutory timeframes, even where the referral does not necessarily represent the highest-risk or highest-priority work for that team.
- Complex applications are often concentrated among more experienced planners due to capability gaps across the broader team, while less experienced planners may have limited opportunities to progressively build capability through supported exposure to more complex work.
- Capability development is not consistently supported by a structured training, mentoring or development pathway. Previous development models relied heavily on informal mentorship, shadowing and access to experienced staff, but staff turnover and workload pressure have reduced the availability of these supports.

Summary

While default referrals provide a simple safeguard to ensure technical teams are notified, they can also create avoidable referral volume where payment has not yet been received or where the application does not present a material issue requiring specialist input. The current approach risks allocating internal referral effort based on default workflow settings rather than actual assessment need. This can place pressure on Development Engineering, Environmental Health and Plumbing resources, increase handling activity and reduce the ability of those teams to prioritise higher-risk matters.

Application assignment also plays an important role in workforce capability development. Staff feedback indicates that less experienced planners require structured support, mentoring and progressive exposure to suitable application types to build confidence and competency. However, development opportunities are not consistently managed through formal planner development profiles, and complex work can become concentrated among senior staff where capability gaps exist.

Recommendations

24. Remove Default Internal Referrals and Introduce Referral Triage Rules

Development Engineering, Environmental Health and Plumbing referrals are currently created by default during application assignment, regardless of whether the application presents a material issue. This can create unnecessary referral volume, place unnecessary pressure on internal resources to respond within planning statutory timeframes and adds avoidable handling time to the application process where technical input may not be required.

It is recommended that Environmental Health and Plumbing be removed as default referral steps for all applications and that agreed referral triage rules be developed to support Planning Support to triage whether a referral is required. The referral triage rules should be developed by Environmental Health and Plumbing respectively, in consultation with Planning to ensure they are simple enough to triage at the Acknowledgement Letter process stage, only once a payment has been made and should clearly identify the application types or risk triggers requiring technical input and are stored centrally for easy reference and updating.

Where a matter clearly does not meet the agreed referral criteria, it should not be referred however, where uncertainty exists or Planning Support cannot confidently determine whether the criteria apply, the matter should be referred to either Environmental Health or Plumbing as appropriate, who can then assess and determine whether further updates to the referral triage rules are required. This would maintain a risk-managed safeguard consistent with the current approach while providing a practical foundation that can be refined over time as referral patterns, planning scheme requirements and operational experience evolve.

In the case of Development Engineering where it has been cited that all applications should be referred, this again should not be automatic but should be included in the Acknowledgement Letter process step and only referred by Planning Support once payment has been made.

Benefit

- Improved alignment of referral effort to actual risk and assessment need, reducing unnecessary Development Engineering, Environmental Health and Plumbing referral volume.
- Clear referral triage rules would improve cross-functional alignment, support more proportionate assessment practices and create a stronger foundation for continuous improvement.
- Reduced effort and increased in processing efficiency.

25. Establish Capability-Based Allocation and Planner Development Profiles

Application allocation is currently influenced by application type, location, complexity, previous involvement, capability and available capacity. However, capability development is not consistently supported by formal planner development profiles. This means allocation for training and development can occur informally, relying on informal communication, Planning Coordinator judgement and day-to-day workload pressures rather than a structured view of each planner's experience, capability gaps and development needs, as assessed by their Team Leader.

It is recommended that Team Leaders establish planner development profiles to support more deliberate allocation of applications for capability development. Each profile should identify the planner's current capability level, application types they can assess independently, application types requiring support or review, targeted development areas, supervision needs and suitable stretch opportunities.

Application allocation should then consider both operational capacity and development objectives. Where appropriate, lower-risk applications, repeat application types or selected elements of more complex applications could be allocated to developing planners with appropriate coaching, peer review or Team Leader oversight. Higher-risk or more complex matters should continue to be allocated to planners with the required capability or used as supported development opportunities where suitable.

Development profiles should be reviewed and agreed at least monthly through Team Leader one-on-one performance and development discussions with each planner. These discussions should be informed by quality review outcomes, RFI patterns, assessment performance, feedback and observed confidence.

Benefit:

- Clearer visibility of each planner's strengths, development needs and support requirements.
- Better alignment between application complexity and planner capability.
- Reduced reliance on a small number of highly experienced planners for complex work.
- Stronger succession planning and workforce resilience.
- Better use of Team Leader one-on-ones to support capability growth and performance development.
- Improved workload allocation by balancing operational capacity with longer-term capability building.

Acknowledgement Letter

Process Objective

Confirm key application details, verify whether payment has been received, establish any required referral tasks, and issue the acknowledgement letter to the applicant. This step ensures the application record is accurate, required internal or external referrals are initiated where applicable, and the applicant is formally advised whether the application can progress or payment remains outstanding.

Relevant Insights

- Default internal referrals are currently being created during the application assignment stage before payment is received. This may result in unnecessary work for internal departments.
- Internal referral teams can experience pressure to prioritise planning referrals because of statutory timeframes, even where the referral does not necessarily represent the highest-risk or highest-priority work for that team.
- There is no formal payment follow-up process for unpaid planning applications, meaning unpaid applications may remain inactive for extended periods without consistent customer reminders, workflow closure or escalation.
- Key application information, tasks, emails and progress updates may sit with individual officers rather than being centrally visible across the team.
- Staff feedback indicates that core systems and workflow practices do not always provide sufficient visibility of application status, deadlines, outstanding actions or ownership across the team.
- Handover processes are manual and inconsistent, relying on individuals to document and communicate what is due when applications need to be reassigned.

Summary

Current practice does not appear to consistently use payment status as a clear workflow gate, meaning internal referrals may be generated before an application is ready to proceed. This can create avoidable work for internal teams and place pressure on referral areas to respond within planning timeframes, even where technical input may not yet be required.

There is also limited formal control over unpaid applications once the initial acknowledgement has been issued. Without a structured payment follow-up process, unpaid applications may remain inactive for extended periods without consistent customer communication, closure or escalation. This creates uncertainty for applicants and reduces visibility of the true status of applications that are not progressing.

More broadly, staff feedback indicates that application information, workflow status and outstanding actions are not always sufficiently visible across the team. Where application information sits with individual officers rather than in shared systems, continuity can be affected during leave or staff absence.

Recommendations

26. [Introduce a Payment Confirmation Control Before Issuing Referrals](#)

Where payment has not been received at the acknowledgement letter stage, internal and external referrals are still being initiated to:

- Building
- Development Engineers
- Environmental Health
- Environmental Planning
- Environmental Services
- Heritage Planner
- Plumbing
- Property Officer
- TasNetworks
- TasWater

This can create unnecessary referral activity and avoidable handling where an application may not proceed.

It is recommended that no internal or external referrals be issued until payment has been received. Where payment is outstanding, Planning Support should issue the acknowledgement letter advising the applicant that payment remains outstanding and that the application will not progress to referral or assessment until payment is received.

Customer Service should notify Planning Support in addition to the Planner once payment has been received, through a defined workflow notification in the case management system. Only once payment has been confirmed should Planning Support initiate any required internal or external referrals, in accordance with any Duty Planner notes from the Preliminary Assessment and agreed referral triage rules outlined in [Recommendation 24](#).

Benefit

- Reduced unnecessary internal and external referral activity for unpaid applications.
- Clearer process governance between acknowledgement, payment confirmation, referral and assessment stages.

27. Establish a Formal Payment Follow-Up Process for Unpaid Applications

There is currently no formal process for following up planning applications where payment has not been received. Where payment remains outstanding, follow-up appears to occur informally or inconsistently, creating a risk that applications remain inactive for extended periods without clear customer communication, workflow closure or escalation.

It is recommended that Planning Support establish a formal payment follow-up process for unpaid planning applications, consistent with their role in the initial acknowledgement letter process. This should include a defined review cycle, such as monthly or quarterly reviews depending on application volume and available capacity, to identify unpaid applications and issue follow-up communication to applicants.

Where practical, this process could be supported through a mail merge or other standardised communication process to reduce manual effort and ensure consistency. Follow-up reminders should clearly advise that the application cannot progress to referral or assessment until payment is received.

Benefit

- Clearer customer communication regarding outstanding payments.
- Improved workflow control by ensuring unpaid applications are reviewed and actioned regularly.
- Reduced administrative ambiguity around when and how unpaid applications should be progressed, followed up or closed.

28. Formalise the Response for Unpaid Applications

Where planning applications remain unpaid for extended periods, the current process actions appear to be informal and reactive. Unpaid applications are generally only reviewed (not assessed) on an infrequent schedule, with details recorded in a spreadsheet and site inspections arranged to determine whether works have been completed without approval. Where unauthorised works are identified, matters may then be raised with the Compliance team.

This creates a risk that potential unauthorised development is identified inconsistently or through individual initiative rather than a defined compliance pathway. It also creates reliance on manual spreadsheets and retrospective site inspections, rather than a structured risk-based process for managing unpaid or inactive applications.

It is recommended that Council formalise a compliance response for unpaid planning applications. The process should define when an unpaid application is to be referred for compliance review.

This process should be documented and supported through Pathway or an approved compliance tracking system (e.g. database) rather than a standalone spreadsheet.

Benefit

- Improved governance over unpaid planning applications.
- Earlier identification of higher-risk applications that may require site inspection or compliance action.
- Reduced reliance on informal follow-up, individual initiative and manual spreadsheets.

29. Enhance File Management and Storage Using Modern Digital Systems

It is recommended Council enhance file management and storage by implementing modern digital systems that provide a consistent, secure and accessible approach to creating, storing, locating and managing planning records. The future approach should establish clear digital filing structures, agreed naming conventions, appropriate access controls and defined responsibilities for maintaining complete and accurate records.

The system should integrate with relevant planning workflows so documents and correspondence are captured at the appropriate stage, reducing the need for duplicate entry or storage across multiple locations. Staff should be supported through practical guidance, training and quality controls to ensure the system is used consistently and remains aligned with Council's records management obligations.

Benefit:

- Easier and faster access to complete planning records.
 - Improved consistency in how files and correspondence are named, stored and managed.
 - Reduced duplication of records across systems and storage locations.
 - Improved data integrity and confidence that staff are working from the current version of information.
 - Better visibility of application history, decisions and outstanding actions.
 - Stronger information security, access control and records management compliance.
 - Improved collaboration and continuity when work is transferred between staff.
 - Reduced administrative effort associated with locating, saving and reconciling information.
- A scalable digital foundation that supports future workflow automation, reporting and service improvements.

13. Assessment

Initial Assessment

Process Objective

Update the proposal description and complete the case management Development Checklist to determine whether the application contains the basic information required for assessment. Where information is missing or insufficient, this step identifies and records matters to be addressed through an RFI so the application can progress.

Relevant Insights

Staff and stakeholder feedback indicates:

- Assessment effort is not always proportionate to the scale, complexity or risk of the proposal, with lower-risk applications sometimes perceived to receive the same level of scrutiny as more complex matters.
- Assessment practices can at times appear risk-averse or compliance-heavy, with some matters perceived to involve additional checking or documentation beyond what is proportionate to the planning risk or material assessment issue.
- The assessment process remains highly manual and requires planners to review and cross-reference multiple plans and planning scheme requirements under statutory time pressure.
- Assessment templates, standard text and condition libraries are not sufficiently developed or consistently available, requiring planners to manually source planning scheme content, draft conditions and prepare detailed documentation even for lower-risk outcomes.
- Unclear assessment guides, limited decision frameworks and inconsistent quality controls mean similar assessment issues can be reconsidered repeatedly rather than resolved through consistent guidance.
- Inconsistent use of the Development Checklist and reliance on locally held information can reduce visibility of application status, outstanding requirements and assessment progress across the team, making the transfer of work difficult when required.
- Limited structured onboarding and development support can increase the time required for newer planners to complete assessment tasks confidently and consistently.

Summary

The feedback points to broader consistency and capability issues within the assessment process. Assessment effort can vary depending on the planner involved, the availability of clear guidance and the level of confidence in applying professional judgement. Where agreed assessment guides and decision frameworks are not sufficiently defined, planners may need to work through similar issues repeatedly, increasing effort and reducing consistency.

The manual nature of assessment work also places a high reliance on individual knowledge and work practices. This is compounded where assessment information is not updated centrally, limiting visibility of progress, outstanding issues and assessment rationale across the team. This reduces transparency, makes quality review more difficult and limits the ability to transfer work between planners when required.

Recommendations

30. Define Internal Assessment Guides

Assessment practices are not consistently supported by documented internal assessment guides, agreed interpretation positions or clear decision frameworks. As a result, planners may need to work through similar assessment issues repeatedly, and assessment effort can vary depending on individual experience, risk appetite and confidence in applying professional judgement.

The department should establish a set of internal assessment guides, or operational policies, to support consistent interpretation and application of the planning scheme. These guides should provide planners with a common reference point for recurring assessment issues, standard expectations and risk-based assessment considerations.

These guides should not replace professional judgement or statutory assessment requirements. Instead, they should provide a consistent internal framework for how common planning matters are interpreted and assessed. This would help ensure that similar issues are approached consistently across planners, reduce unnecessary rework, support more proportionate assessment effort and improve confidence in decision-making.

A defined governance process should be established for developing and approving internal assessment guides. This process should be led by the Planning leadership team, in consultation with relevant internal subject matter experts where applicable. Final approval should sit with the General Manager as the operational and organisational risk owner for the agreed interpretation or assessment position. This would provide clear accountability for endorsed assessment guides, ensure material risk or precedent issues are escalated appropriately, and give planners confidence that agreed positions have been considered and approved at the appropriate level before being applied consistently across assessments.

Once a business guide has been approved, it should be clearly communicated to the department, preferably through an in-person department meeting where the rationale, intended application and any practical implications can be discussed. This would provide staff with an opportunity to ask questions, clarify expectations and confirm alignment before the rule is applied in day-to-day assessment activity.

Implementation should occur progressively, starting with the most common or frequently contested assessment issues. Agreed assessment guides should be captured in a central knowledge hub, linked where relevant to the Development Checklist, and maintained through version control, ownership and regular review. Each rule should clearly identify the issue it addresses, the agreed interpretation or assessment approach, relevant planning scheme provisions, supporting rationale and practical examples.

Assessment guides only create value if they are actively applied through quality control points. Team Leaders should therefore use them as a quality control mechanism when reviewing and approving RFIs and assessment reports, ensuring relevant guidance has been applied consistently and that any departure from standard practice is explained and appropriately escalated. This would ensure the assessment guides are not simply reference material, but are embedded into day-to-day assessment practice, quality review and planner development.



(Figure 10 – Planning Assessment Guides Process)

Where appropriate, assessment guides or plain-language interpretation guidance should also be made available to Elected Members, applicants, consultants and stakeholders. This would improve transparency around how Council interprets and applies the planning scheme, reduce uncertainty,

support better-quality applications and provide a clearer basis for pre-lodgement advice, RFIs and assessment outcomes.

Importantly, the assessment guides should also provide a foundation for continuous policy iteration. As recurring issues, appeals, customer feedback, quality reviews or changes to the planning scheme identify areas of uncertainty, Council should update or refine the relevant assessment guides. Over time, this would create a structured feedback loop between day-to-day assessment practice, stakeholder experience, internal quality review and future policy development. Defining and maintaining internal planning assessment guides would also create an important foundation for future AI-assisted planning tools.

Benefit

- Improved consistency, transparency and confidence in assessment practice by giving planners a common reference point for recurring planning issues and interpretation decisions.
- Reduced reliance on individual knowledge by providing agreed assessment positions, supporting rationale and practical examples.
- More proportionate and risk-based assessment by helping planners apply agreed assessment guides to common or recurring issues.
- Improved onboarding, capability development and quality review by embedding assessment guides into day-to-day assessment practice and Team Leader review points.
- Clearer visibility for Elected Members, applicants, consultants and stakeholders regarding Council's assessment methodology and interpretation approach.
- Increased assessment efficiency and improved processing times by reducing repeated reconsideration of similar issues, unnecessary checking, inconsistent interpretation and avoidable effort.
- A practical foundation for continuous improvement and policy refinement by creating a structured feedback loop between assessment practice, appeals, customer feedback, quality reviews and planning scheme changes.
- Improved readiness for future AI-assisted planning tools by creating approved, version-controlled assessment guides that can be used to train, configure or validate AI-enabled customer guidance, application triage and planner decision-support.

31. Strengthen Team Leader Coaching to Support Professional Judgement

Staff and stakeholder feedback indicates that assessment practices can at times appear risk-averse or compliance-heavy, with planners relying on additional checking, escalation or documentation where they may not feel confident exercising professional judgement. This can increase assessment effort, contribute to avoidable delay and reinforce a more defensive assessment culture.

In addition to developing internal assessment guides, Team Leaders should provide more structured on-the-job coaching to help planners exercise professional judgement confidently, proportionately and in a more solutions-based way. This coaching should focus on helping planners understand when further checking, escalation or additional information is genuinely required, and when it is appropriate to proceed based on the available evidence, planning scheme requirements and agreed assessment guides.

Coaching should occur through regular one-on-one discussions, live application review, RFI and assessment report feedback, and short debriefs on complex or recurring assessment issues. The focus should be on building planner confidence to assess materiality, risk, discretion and proportionality, rather than simply correcting individual outputs.

Team Leaders should also use these coaching opportunities to encourage planners to identify practical and compliant pathways for resolving assessment issues where available. This would help reinforce the difference between necessary statutory rigour and avoidable over-processing and support a more customer-focused assessment culture without compromising the integrity of the planning scheme.

Where recurring issues are identified through coaching, these should be used to inform updates to assessment guides, training materials, quality review practices and future team discussions. This would create a feedback loop between day-to-day assessment experience, planner development and continuous improvement.

Benefit

- Improved planner confidence and capability in exercising professional judgement.
- More proportionate and solutions-based assessment practices.
- Reduced unnecessary escalation, checking and over-processing.
- Faster development of newer planners through practical coaching and real application examples.
- Improved consistency in how discretion, materiality and risk are assessed.
- Stronger customer-focused assessment culture while maintaining statutory integrity.
- Better feedback loops between assessment practice, assessment guides, training and continuous improvement.

32. Establish the Development Checklist as the Central Assessment Record

In line with [Recommendation 29](#), which recommends using enhanced file management systems Council should formally establish the case management Development Checklist as the central location for recording assessment progress, key issues, information gaps, assessment rationale, referral considerations, RFI matters, decision points and outstanding actions.

Assessment information is not always recorded consistently in one central location, with staff at times relying on emails, individual working documents or informal knowledge to track application progress. This reduces visibility of application status, makes quality review more difficult and creates a significant continuity risk where applications need to be reassigned due to leave, staff absence, workload redistribution or staff turnover.

The Development Checklist should therefore be used as the primary operational record of assessment progress. Planners should be required to update the checklist progressively as assessment work is completed, rather than retrospectively or only at key approval points. Team Leaders should reinforce this expectation through application review, workload discussions and quality control checks.

Benefit

- Improved visibility of application progress, outstanding issues and assessment status.
- Reduced reliance on emails, individual working documents and informal knowledge to track assessment progress.
- Improved continuity where applications need to be reassigned due to leave, absence, workload balancing or staff turnover.
- Reduced rework and handover effort when applications move between planners.
- Stronger quality review by giving Team Leaders a central record of assessment progress and rationale.

33. Review and Standardise Assessment Templates and Condition Libraries

Feedback indicates that assessment templates, standard text and condition libraries are not sufficiently complete or consistently available. This requires planners to manually source planning scheme content, draft conditions and prepare detailed documentation, increasing effort and reducing consistency.

In accordance with [Recommendation 21](#), and in support of work already underway by the senior team members, the department should review and update all planning assessment report templates, standard condition wording and related assessment documentation to ensure they are complete, current, consistent and accessible through the proposed Departmental Intranet and Operational Knowledge Hub.

This review should include confirming that templates cover all relevant zones, codes and common assessment pathways, reducing the need for planners to manually copy and paste information. The department should also develop or refresh a standard conditions library that provides approved wording, usage guidance and escalation triggers where conditions require legal, technical or leadership review.

For lower-risk or administrative outcomes, including no-permit-required matters, Council should consider whether shorter standardised templates can be used to document the decision efficiently while still capturing the required assessment rationale.

Benefit

- Reduced manual drafting effort.
- Improved consistency in assessment reports, permit conditions and decision documentation.
- Faster preparation and review of assessment outputs.
- Reduced reliance on locally held templates or individual planner examples.
- Improved onboarding and capability development by giving planners access to approved templates, standard wording and practical examples.

34. Ensure Statutory Timeframe and Action Date Management is Within One System

Council should review options to improve how statutory timeframes, internal action dates and assessment milestones are captured and monitored across the planning assessment process.

The current legislative framework includes multiple timeframes that are calculated differently, including business days, calendar days, public holidays, weekends and process-specific pause or restart points. Council's case management system is currently having to be supplemented with additional tools and systems to manage statutory deadlines and internal action dates.

This creates visibility, consistency and continuity risks. It also increases the difficulty for management being able to have central view of action status, workload pressure or applications requiring escalation. It also increases reliance on individual knowledge and locally maintained tools, making it harder to transfer work between planners or manage applications during leave, absence or workload redistribution.

Council should therefore review whether their case management system can be configured to more reliably manage these legislative variables and workflow requirements. If it cannot provide the required functionality, Council should review alternative platform or workflow options that provide greater consistency, visibility and centralised control of statutory dates, internal action dates and required assessment milestones.

Any solution should be accessible to planners, Team Leaders and the Planning Coordinator, and should support operational reporting, workload visibility, escalation, internal buffer targets and business continuity.

Benefit

- Improved visibility of statutory timeframes, internal action dates and upcoming assessment milestones
- Reduced reliance on individual spreadsheet calculators, personal task lists and locally held tracking tools.
- Improved consistency in how legislative timeframes are calculated and managed.
- Stronger management visibility of overdue actions, emerging bottlenecks and applications approaching statutory deadlines.
- Improved continuity when work is reassigned due to leave, absence, workload balancing or staff turnover.
- Improved workload planning and resourcing visibility for Team Leaders and the Planning Coordinator

Initial Referral Assessment

Process Objective

Parallel to the Initial Assessment, internal referral departments complete relevant assessment processes and provide technical advice, conditions or information requirements to support the planning assessment.

Relevant Insights

Staff and stakeholder feedback indicates:

- Internal referral assessment timeframes and service expectations are not consistently defined, monitored or reported through agreed SLAs.
- Council is generally managing to complete internal referral assessments within the required timeframe; however, responses are often returned close to or on the 21-day RFI decision point.
- Stakeholder feedback indicates that RFIs are a major source of frustration, particularly where requests are perceived as repeated, sequential, late-stage, generic, overly detailed, poorly coordinated or not clearly linked to material assessment issues.
- Poorly coordinated or unclear RFIs can increase time, cost, rework and uncertainty for applicants and Council, particularly where referral advice and information requirements are not received, reviewed and consolidated early.
- Information requirements are not always consolidated early, resulting in further information requests being raised after the applicant has already responded to earlier requests or supplied additional material.

Summary

The absence of clearly defined and monitored internal SLAs makes it difficult to identify referral delays, bottlenecks, recurring service issues or resourcing gaps. This limits the organisation's ability to manage referral performance proactively and contributes to a more reactive operating environment.

While areas such as Environmental Planning are generally meeting the required timeframe, the maximum statutory decision point should not operate as the internal service target. Returning referral advice close to the 21-day RFI decision point leaves little or no buffer for planners to review advice, clarify issues, consolidate information requirements and prepare a coordinated RFI where required.

This creates additional pressure for both Planning and referral teams and increases service and regulatory risk where there is any disruption, such as staff leave, absence or workload peaks. It may also contribute to poorer customer experience where information requests are issued late, appear rushed, or are not as well coordinated as they could be.

Recommendations

35. Define Internal Referral Assessment Service Level Agreements

Council should define and agree internal referral Service Level Agreements for all internal referral departments involved in the planning assessment process. These SLAs should be developed collaboratively between Planning and each referral area, taking into account average referral volumes, referral complexity, available resourcing, internal departmental priorities, statutory planning timeframes and the need to maintain a healthy operating buffer for leave, workload peaks and other disruptions.

The SLAs should not simply mirror the maximum statutory timeframe. Instead, they should define internal target response times that allow Planning sufficient time to review referral advice, clarify issues, consolidate information requirements and prepare coordinated RFIs or assessment documentation where required. This would reduce the risk of referral advice being returned too close to statutory decision points and improve the ability of both Planning and referral teams to manage workload proactively.

The agreed SLAs should also define escalation triggers, ownership, reporting requirements and exception handling. Where a referral cannot be completed within the agreed timeframe, the referral area should notify Planning early so that workload, customer communication and statutory risk, including the need for extensions where applicable, can be managed. SLA performance should be monitored and reported regularly by the Planning Coordinator, with recurring delays or resourcing issues escalated through the Planning leadership team and relevant department managers.

Benefit

- Clearer expectations between Planning and internal referral departments
- Improved ability to monitor referral performance, delays and bottlenecks.
- Reduced risk of missing statutory timeframes
- Improved buffer for staff leave, workload peaks and other disruptions
- Better coordination of RFIs, assessment reports and customer communication
- Improved workload planning and resourcing visibility across referral teams.

14. Customer Service Enquiries

Post-Lodgement Enquiries

Process Objective

Receive, record and resolve applicant enquiries after lodgement.

Relevant Insights

Staff and stakeholder feedback indicates:

- Post-lodgement customer enquiries are managed across multiple entry points, including transferred Customer Service calls, emails, and callback tasks, which can make ownership and visibility difficult to manage consistently.
- Customer Service appears to rely on Teams status, direct phone contact or manual message-taking to determine planner availability, creating a process that is dependent on individual responsiveness rather than a clearly managed service pathway.
- Where planners are unavailable, customer enquiries may be recorded and routed back to the planner, creating potential delays, repeat contact and customer frustration where applicants are seeking timely updates.
- Customer enquiries after lodgement can create ad hoc interruptions for planners, reducing available assessment time and contributing to competing demands between technical assessment work and customer responsiveness.
- Limited reporting across call, email and enquiry channels reduces visibility of enquiry volumes, response times, unresolved enquiries, repeat contact and the resource impact of post-lodgement customer support.
- There does not appear to be a clearly defined service standard for post-lodgement enquiry response times, escalation requirements or customer update protocols, increasing the risk of inconsistent customer experience.

Summary

Post-lodgement customer enquiries are an important part of the customer experience, but the current process appears to rely heavily on planner availability and manual handoffs between Customer Service, Records and Planning. While enquiries are generally routed to the allocated planner, the process does not provide visibility of enquiry volumes, response times, unresolved matters or repeat contact.

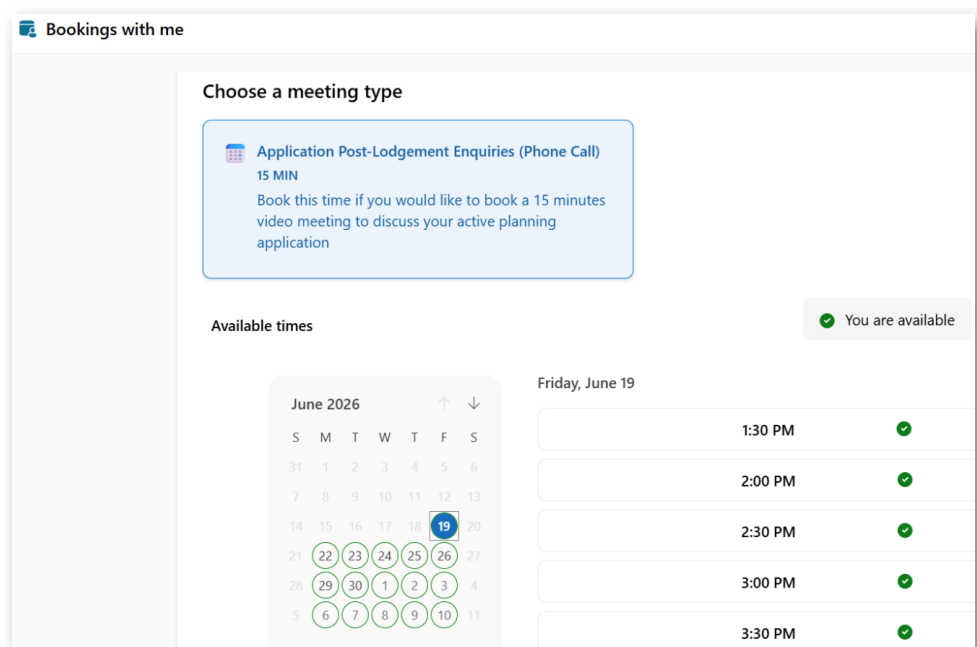
This creates two key risks. First, customers may experience inconsistent response times or need to follow up multiple times to obtain updates. Second, planners may be interrupted by ad hoc enquiries while also trying to progress statutory assessment work, creating competing demands and reducing assessment capacity. Without clear service standards, reporting and escalation pathways, it is difficult for the department to understand demand and manage customer expectations.

Recommendations

36. Implement Managed Appointment Scheduling for Post-Lodgement Customer Enquiries

The department should implement a managed appointment scheduling process for post-lodgement customer enquiries. Similar to [Recommendation 12](#) for pre-lodgement enquiries, this could be through "Microsoft Bookings with me" which Council already pays licensing for and can enable booking handling for each individual planning team member.

This would allow planners to nominate defined times during the day where they are available to receive customer phone calls or online appointments, including defined appointment durations, rather than relying on ad hoc call transfers, manual message-taking or unplanned interruptions during assessment work.



(Figure 11 – Microsoft Booking with Me Client Interface example)

Under this model, Customer Service and Planning could direct applicants to book a suitable time with the allocated planner or relevant planning officer through a controlled booking link. Planners would retain control over their availability, while customers would receive a clearer and more predictable pathway to speak with the appropriate officer. This would also reduce avoidable back-and-forth between Customer Service, Planning and applicants when planners are unavailable.

Links to this service could remain private and be issued directly as part of email correspondence to the applicant where follow-up contact may be

required or provided by Customer Service when applicants contact the main Council enquiries line.

This would allow Council to expand post-lodgement customer contact beyond traditional phone-based support to online video calls, supporting Council's Digital Strategy and providing a more flexible, accessible and professional customer service experience.

Benefit

- Improved customer access to allocated planners through a clear and structured appointment pathway
- Reduced ad hoc interruptions for planners, protecting assessment time and improving workflow focus.
- More predictable customer service by allowing applicants to book available times rather than relying on call-backs.
- Reduced manual handling between Customer Service and Planning when planners are unavailable.
- Improved ability to support multiple contact channels, including video appointments.
- Better visibility of customer contact volumes and durations
- More consistent and professional post-lodgement customer communication

15. Request for Information (RFI)

Review Application Documentation for Information Gaps

Process Objective

Review the application documentation, referral comments and supporting information to determine whether the application contains sufficient information to proceed to assessment, or whether a Request for Further Information is required.

Relevant Insights

Staff and stakeholder feedback indicates:

- RFIs are a major source of customer frustration, particularly where requests are perceived as repeated, sequential, late-stage, generic, overly detailed, poorly coordinated or not clearly linked to material assessment issues.
- Information requirements are not always consolidated early, resulting in further information requests being raised after the applicant has already responded to earlier requests or supplied additional material.
- RFIs can sometimes appear to operate as a default procedural step rather than a targeted mechanism for resolving genuinely material information gaps.
- RFI quality can vary depending on the planner involved, the timing and quality of referral advice received, and the extent to which assessment issues have been identified holistically before the request is issued.
- Poorly coordinated or unclear RFIs can increase time, cost, rework and uncertainty for applicants and Council, particularly where the request does not clearly explain why the information is required or how it relates to the assessment.
- Late or sequential RFIs can contribute to perceptions that the assessment process is reactive, inefficient or lacking coordination, reducing customer confidence in the process.
- Limited quality review or standardisation of RFI content can increase the risk of inconsistent tone, variable levels of detail and requests that are not proportionate to the scale, complexity or risk of the application.

Summary

The RFI process is a key point where assessment quality, customer experience and statutory risk intersect. While RFIs are a legitimate and necessary assessment tool, feedback suggests that their impact on applicants is significantly affected by how clearly, proportionately and comprehensively they are prepared.

Where information requirements are not identified holistically, consolidated effectively or clearly linked to material assessment issues, the process can create avoidable delay, additional cost and uncertainty. It can also increase internal rework, as planners and referral teams may need to review further submissions, clarify unclear requests or manage follow-up queries from applicants.

Avoidable RFIs for unnecessary, minor or low-materiality details can also create additional work for both applicants and Council. This contributes to capacity pressure by increasing assessment effort, generating additional correspondence and requiring planners to review information that may not materially affect the planning outcome.

Recommendations

37. Reduce Avoidable RFIs

Council should reinforce a solutions-based approach to minor information gaps, discrepancies or clarification issues that do not materially affect the planning assessment. Where possible, planners should seek to resolve these matters through direct, practical engagement with the applicant or consultant before issuing a formal RFI, which can create additional cost and effort for both parties.

This may include a brief phone call, where appropriate, to clarify a minor discrepancy, confirm an interpretation, request a small administrative correction or resolve an issue that does not require a formal statutory information request.

Formal RFIs should continue to be used where information is genuinely required to assess the application, manage statutory risk, support referral advice or address material planning issues. However, they should not be used as the default response where a minor matter can be resolved more efficiently through simple clarification.

This approach should be supported by Team Leader coaching and quality review to ensure planners apply professional judgement consistently and proportionately.

Benefit

- Reduced avoidable cost, effort and delay for applicants and Council.
- More proportionate use of RFIs for genuinely material information gaps
- Reduced planner workload associated with preparing, issuing and reviewing unnecessary RFIs.
- Improved customer experience through faster and more practical issue resolution
- Increased planner confidence in applying professional judgement.
- Reduced rework and correspondence for minor or low-materiality issues
- Improved assessment efficiency reducing pressure on capacity.

38. Establish an Internal RFI Issue Target to Improve Timeliness and Create Statutory Buffer

The Development Services Department should establish an internal target for issuing RFIs earlier than the maximum statutory decision point. For example, the department could initially target RFIs being issued within 16 days of lodgement, rather than treating the 21-day point as the effective operating deadline.

The purpose of this target would be to create a practical operating buffer for planners, referral teams and Team Leaders to identify information gaps, review referral advice, consolidate requirements and quality check RFIs before they are issued. It would also support a better customer outcome by providing applicants with earlier notice of information requirements and reducing the likelihood of late, rushed or poorly coordinated RFIs.

Initially, this target should be used as a management and improvement measure rather than a hard performance KPI. The department should use it to understand current process efficiency, identify bottlenecks, compare performance across application types, and assess whether improvements to referral SLAs, assessment triage, assessment guides and RFI quality control are reducing time to issue.

Once the process has stabilised and sufficient baseline data has been collected, Council could consider adopting an average monthly RFI issue timeframe as a departmental performance measure. Over time, and once the operating model is mature, this could also inform individual performance discussions where appropriate, provided the measure is interpreted in context, including application complexity and referral dependency.

The target should be monitored by the Planning Coordinator and reported regularly as part of operational performance reporting. Exceptions should be reviewed to identify whether delays were caused by referral timing, planner workload, application complexity, unclear assessment guides, quality review delays or other process issues.

Benefit

- Supports earlier and more coordinated communication with applicants.
- Reduces the risk of late, rushed or poorly consolidated RFIs.
- Provides an initial yardstick for measuring assessment efficiency and process improvement.
- Improves visibility of bottlenecks affecting RFI timeliness.
- Enables future departmental performance monitoring once the process is stable.

39. Improve Communication Through Plain-Language Templates and AI-Assisted Drafting

Council should strengthen the clarity and RFI and assessment communication by developing plain-language templates, standard wording and approved drafting prompts that help planners explain information requirements in a way applicants can more easily understand.

This recommendation is not intended to reduce the statutory or technical rigour. Rather, it should ensure that each request clearly explains what information is required, why it is required, how it relates to the planning assessment, and what the applicant needs to do in response. Where technical or regulatory language is required, it should be supported by plain-language explanation so that applicants can understand the issue without needing to interpret planning terminology unnecessarily.

Council should consider using Microsoft 365 Copilot which is already approved to use, or an equivalent approved AI-assisted drafting tool, to support this process. Templated prompts could be developed to help planners convert technical assessment requirements into clearer applicant-facing language, while preserving mandatory planning scheme references, statutory requirements and approved internal assessment guides.

Use of AI-assisted drafting should remain subject to planner review and Team Leader approval. The tool should support drafting quality and consistency, not replace professional judgement or statutory assessment responsibility. Approved prompts, templates and examples should be stored in the departmental knowledge hub and reviewed periodically to ensure they remain accurate, current and aligned with Council's regulatory obligations.

This recommendation also applies to the drafting of the Application Report.

Benefit

- Clearer and more accessible RFI communication for applicants
- Reduced applicant confusion about what information is required and why.
- Improved consistency in RFI tone, structure and explanation
- Reduced follow-up enquiries caused by unclear or overly technical wording.
- Better alignment between technical assessment requirements and applicant-facing communication
- Improved support for planners through approved templates, standard wording and drafting prompts.
- Improved customer experience while maintaining statutory and regulatory integrity.

RFI Approval

Process Objective

Review and approve the proposed Request for Further Information before it is issued to the applicant. This step ensures the request is necessary, proportionate, clearly worded, linked to the assessment requirements, and limited to information required to progress the planning assessment.

Relevant Insights

- Stakeholder feedback indicates that RFI quality can vary depending on the planner involved, the timing and quality of referral advice received, and the extent to which information requirements have been consolidated before the request is prepared.
- While an RFI approval process exists, it is largely managed through emails and spreadsheet registers, limiting visibility of approval status, recurring quality issues, rework trends and potential planner training needs.

Summary

The RFI approval process is not yet operating as a structured quality and learning control. While individual requests can be reviewed before issue, the current approach provides limited ability to identify whether quality issues are isolated, recurring or linked to broader process, referral coordination or capability gaps.

This means RFI quality can be managed case by case, but patterns in rework, inconsistent drafting, late consolidation of information requirements or planner support needs may not be visible enough to drive targeted improvement. As a result, the approval process may reduce immediate risk on individual applications without fully supporting consistency, coaching, training or broader process improvement across the team that can improve efficiency.

Recommendations

40. Establish a System-Driven RFI Approval Workflow

The approval process should be managed through a workflow-enabled system, such as Teams Approvals supported by a SharePoint database, or another suitable corporate platform. While case management tasks may be used to distribute work, the current configuration may not provide the level of reporting required to analyse RFI approval trends, rework, approval outcomes and recurring quality issues.

The workflow should capture key approval information, including:

- Application reference details including lodgement date and type
- Planner
- Development checklist gap
- Drafted RFI communication

- Date submitted for approval
- Approval determination & date
- Reviewer feedback (e.g. rework required)

This would create a historical approval dataset that can be used to report on RFI volumes, approval timeframes, lodgement-to-RFI duration, rework rates, approval outcomes and recurring feedback themes.

This reporting should be used to improve operational visibility and support management of assessment quality. Over time, the data could help identify bottlenecks, recurring drafting issues, training needs, referral coordination issues, application types that frequently require RFIs, and opportunities to improve templates, assessment guides or planner coaching.

The process should also include automated business continuity rules for approval coverage when Team Leaders or other approval officers are on leave or unavailable.

Benefit

- Improved visibility of RFI approval volumes, status, timeframes and outcomes
- Reduced reliance on emails and spreadsheet registers to manage approval activity.
- Stronger historical record of approval decisions, feedback and rework
- Better operational reporting on lodgement-to-RFI duration, approval turnaround and recurring quality issues.
- Improved ability to identify planner training needs, template gaps and referral coordination issues.
- Reduced risk of approval delays close to statutory timeframes.
- More consistent RFI quality review and clearer accountability across the approval process

41. Establish RFI Approval Quality and Efficiency Measures

As an extension to the above recommendation, the department should introduce soft RFI approval measures to improve visibility of RFI quality, efficiency and capability development over time. Initially, these measures should be used for operational learning and process improvement rather than as formal individual performance KPIs.

A key measure could include the proportion of RFIs approved without rework, supported by related measures such as RFIs returned for amendment, common reasons for amendment, approval turnaround time and lodgement-to-RFI issue duration. These measures would provide an early indicator of

whether RFIs are being prepared clearly, proportionately and in accordance with agreed assessment guides before being submitted for approval.

The intent should not be to discourage legitimate RFIs or create pressure to approve requests that require further refinement. Rather, the measure should help the department identify recurring drafting issues, inconsistent application of assessment guides, referral coordination gaps, training needs and opportunities to support planners in applying professional judgement and a solutions-based approach.

Benefit

- Better operational reporting on RFI quality, timeliness and process maturity
- Stronger support for planner coaching
- Improved identification of business rule gaps, training needs and recurring drafting issues.
- Improved consistency in RFI preparation and approval
- Reduced rework and approval delays over time
- Improved customer outcomes through clearer, more proportionate and better coordinated RFIs

16. Advertising Period

Post Site Notices

Process Objective

Commence the statutory advertising period by posting the required Site Notice on the applicable property.

Relevant Insights

- Observations indicate that site notices are currently posted by Planners and Planning Support, despite the activity generally being administrative in nature.
- Where planner capacity is constrained, using technical planning resources for administrative field tasks can contribute to avoidable capacity pressure.

Summary

Posting site notices is an important statutory process step, but in most cases, it does not require technical planning assessment. Continuing to rely on planners to complete routine site notice posting can draw limited technical capacity away from higher-value assessment work, particularly during workload peaks or periods of reduced staffing.

The underlying issue is one of role alignment. Administrative and repeatable tasks should, where appropriate, be allocated to support resources so planners can focus on activities that require technical judgement, assessment expertise or statutory decision-making.

Recommendations

42. Delegate Routine Site Notice Posting to Planning Support

The Development Services Department should review the current approach to posting site notices and, where appropriate, delegate this activity to Planning Support rather than requiring planners with limited capacity to complete the task.

This does not mean planners should be excluded from posting site notices in all circumstances. Planners may continue to complete this activity where it is efficient or operationally appropriate, such as where the site is already on a planned travel route, where a related site inspection is required, or where the matter requires technical judgement. However, routine site notice posting should not be prioritised for planners during periods of high demand or reduced capacity where the task can be completed by Planning Support.

Benefit

- Better use of technical planning capacity by supporting planners to focus on assessment work where possible.
- Reduced administrative burden on planners.
- Improved ability to manage capacity pinch points during high workload periods.
- Clearer separation between technical assessment activity and administrative process tasks

17. Detailed Assessment

Application Report and Approval

Process Objective

Prepare, review and approve the draft assessment report prior to final determination. This step ensures internal referral comments, recommended conditions and assessment findings are reviewed and approved by the Team Leader.

Relevant Insights

- Assessment templates, standard text and condition libraries are not sufficiently developed or consistently available, requiring planners to manually source planning scheme content, draft conditions and prepare detailed documentation, including for lower risk outcomes.
- Assessment report quality and level of detail can vary depending on the planner involved, the complexity of the application, and the availability of standard templates, condition wording and assessment guidance.
- Operational KPIs for assessment report preparation and approval are either not consistently defined, clearly understood or actively monitored. This limits the department's ability to prioritise work systematically, identify capacity constraints, assess resourcing requirements and reduce reliance on senior staff knowledge to determine where effort should be focused.
- Quality measures for assessment report preparation and approval are not consistently defined or monitored, limiting the department's ability to identify rework trends, recurring review issues and individual planner development needs, including coaching, training or performance support.
- Limited visibility of recurring report review issues reduces the department's ability to identify process improvement opportunities, including where additional templates, assessment guides or condition guidance may be required.
- Observations indicate that application reports are often prepared and finalised close to the end of statutory timeframes.

Summary

Report preparation and approval are not yet supported by the level of standardisation, operational visibility and quality measurement needed to manage assessment work consistently and proactively.

The absence of clearly defined operational KPIs and quality measures limits the department's ability to understand where effort is being spent, where capacity constraints are emerging, and whether recurring report issues relate to individual development needs or broader process gaps. This reduces the ability to prioritise work systematically, assess resourcing requirements, target coaching and training, or improve templates, assessment guides and condition guidance. It also increases reliance on senior staff knowledge to identify where issues are emerging and where effort should be focused, creating additional pressure and continuity risk.

These issues are compounded by a “just-in-time” delivery model, where reports are often prepared and finalised close to statutory deadlines. This leaves limited buffer for unexpected disruptions, increasing pressure on planners and approvers and reducing the opportunity for proactive quality management.

Recommendations

Note: The following recommendations also apply to this process step:

- [30. Define Internal Assessment Guides and Planning Interpretation Guidance](#)
- [33. Review and Standardise Assessment Templates and Condition Libraries](#)
- [39. Improve Communication Through Plain-Language Templates and AI-Assisted Drafting](#)

43. [Establish an Internal Application Report Completion Target to Improve Timeliness and Create Statutory Buffer](#)

Similar to [Recommendation 38](#), the Development Services Department should establish an internal target for preparing and submitting draft assessment reports for Team Leader review earlier than the relevant statutory deadline. For example, the department could initially target draft assessment reports being submitted for review a defined number of business days before the statutory timeframe expires, rather than allowing reports to be routinely finalised close to the deadline.

The purpose of this target would be to create a practical operating buffer for planners and Team Leaders resolve quality issues and finalise decision documentation before statutory timeframes are reached. This would reduce the risk of reports being completed under time pressure and provide greater opportunity for quality review, escalation and correction where required.

Initially, this target should be used as a management and improvement measure rather than a hard performance KPI. The department should use it to understand current assessment workflow efficiency, identify bottlenecks, compare performance across application types, and assess whether improvements to templates, condition libraries, assessment guides, referral coordination and quality review processes are reducing report preparation and approval time.

Once the process has stabilised and sufficient baseline data has been collected, Council should consider adopting an average monthly report completion or approval timeframe as a departmental performance measure. Over time, and once the operating model is mature, this could also inform individual performance discussions where appropriate, provided the measure

is interpreted in context, including application complexity, referral dependency, workload and planner experience.

The target should be monitored by the Planning Coordinator and reported regularly as part of operational performance reporting. Exceptions should be reviewed to identify whether delays were caused by referral timing, planner workload, application complexity, unclear assessment guides, template or condition gaps, quality review delays or other process issues.

Benefit

- Creates a practical buffer before statutory deadlines.
- Over time will reduce the risk of assessment reports being prepared or approved under time pressure
- Provides an initial yardstick for measuring assessment workflow efficiency and process improvement.
- Improves visibility of bottlenecks affecting report preparation and approval.
- Improves workload planning and resourcing visibility.
- Enables future departmental performance monitoring once the process is stable.

18. Council Referral

Council Review and Determination

Process Objective

Present the Application Report to Council for review and determination, record the final decision and any additional conditions, and ensure the assessment record is updated so the application can progress to finalisation.

Relevant Insights

- Staff feedback indicates that the planning team operates in a high-pressure environment involving complex rules, statutory deadlines, customer frustration and public scrutiny, which can contribute to stress, defensive behaviours and reduced confidence in decision-making.
- Staff raised concerns relating to psychological safety, particularly in public-facing or high-scrutiny situations, reinforcing the need for clear escalation pathways, role clarity, leadership support and appropriate controls to protect staff wellbeing.
- Council review meetings create an important opportunity for planners to provide technical clarification to Elected Members, explain how planning requirements have been applied, and support transparent decision-making.
- However, without a clearly defined support model, staff may feel exposed when providing technical advice in a public or politically sensitive setting, particularly where decisions are complex, contested or subject to community concern.
- Limited confidence or perceived psychological safety in Council review settings may reduce the willingness or ability of technical staff to actively support Elected Members with clear, practical explanations of assessment reasoning, planning scheme requirements and recommended conditions.
- Elected Member feedback indicates that some constituent concerns about planning are not always specific, evidence-based or linked to a clearly identified process failure or decision issue. In some cases, concerns appear to reflect broader dissatisfaction with planning regulation, perceived impacts, misinformation or frustration with a particular outcome rather than a verified defect in the planning process.
- At the same time, Elected Member feedback also recognises that repeated or consistent concerns should not be dismissed. Even where individual concerns may not be fully supported by facts, they can still indicate a broader perception problem, particularly where customers experience the process as unclear, costly, difficult to navigate or insufficiently transparent.

Summary

The Council Review step is a critical point where technical planning assessment, Elected Member decision-making and public confidence intersect. It is also one of the most visible points in the planning process, particularly where applications are complex, contested or subject to community concern.

The underlying issue is that staff may want to provide clearer technical support and explanation during Council review processes, but can feel exposed where matters are complex, contested or publicly scrutinised. Without clear role expectations, pre-meeting preparation and leadership support, staff may be less confident contributing actively, which can reduce the clarity available to Elected Members and increase pressure on individual officers.

Elected Member feedback also indicates that some constituent concerns about planning may be perception-based, generalised or not fully supported by specific evidence. At the same time, repeated concerns about cost, complexity, timeframes, communication and perceived inconsistency indicate that public confidence remains an important issue. This suggests that Council needs to distinguish between factual process issues and broader perception issues, while responding constructively to both.

A stronger Council Review process should therefore support informed decision-making in three ways:

- i. Ensuring Elected Members receive timely and considered technical advice.
- ii. Protecting staff from being required to respond to new or complex issues without adequate preparation, and
- iii. Improving public understanding of why a robust, transparent and evidence-based planning process is necessary to balance private interests, community expectations, economic development, environmental considerations and statutory obligations.

Recommendations

44. Establish a Routine Pre-Meeting Question Protocol for Council Review Matters

Council should formalise the existing practice of Elected Members submitting technical planning questions ahead of Council review meetings and adopt it as a routine protocol. Where possible, Elected Members should submit questions relating to planning applications to management at least two business days before the relevant Council meeting.

The purpose of this protocol is to ensure staff are able to provide considered, accurate and properly supported responses to technical questions, particularly where matters involve complex planning scheme interpretation, recommended conditions, precedent risk or contested stakeholder issues.

Formal pre-meeting questions should be directed through the appropriate management channel, rather than directly to individual planners, so that responses can be coordinated by the Manager, Team Leader and relevant assessing planner or technical officer. This would help ensure that advice provided to Elected Members is consistent, appropriately framed and aligned

with the assessment report, statutory requirements and any relevant internal assessment guides.

The protocol should not prevent Elected Members from asking further follow-up questions during the meeting. However, where possible, questions raised during the meeting should be focused on clarifying the assessment report, officer recommendation, proposed conditions, representations, planning scheme matters or other material already before Council.

Where a question introduces a materially different issue, new line of inquiry or technical matter that has not been raised in advance, staff may not be in a position to provide a fully considered response during the meeting. This can reduce the quality of advice available to Elected Members and may diminish Council's ability to make a fully informed determination on the merits.

Benefit

- Improved quality and consistency of technical responses provided to Elected Members
- Better preparation for complex, contested or high-risk planning matters
- Reduced pressure on individual planners to respond immediately to detailed technical questions.
- Improved psychological safety for staff involved in Council-facing planning matters.
- Reduced risk of inaccurate, incomplete or unqualified responses being provided in public meetings.
- Improved confidence in the Council review and decision-making process

45. Improve Public Communication on the Role, Outcomes and Transparency of the Planning Process

Council should develop a clearer public communication and education approach to explain the purpose, value and outcomes of the statutory planning process. This should include proactive messaging about why a robust and transparent assessment process is necessary, how planning decisions balance social, economic and environmental impacts, and how the process protects both individual applicants and the broader community.

Elected Member feedback indicates that some constituent concerns about planning may be based on perception, misinformation, dissatisfaction with regulation or frustration with a particular outcome rather than a clearly identified process failure. However, these concerns can still influence public confidence in Council's planning function, particularly where the process is

experienced as complex, costly, difficult to navigate or insufficiently transparent.

Council should therefore consider developing plain-language public communication material that explains:

- Why planning assessment is required and what it is designed to protect.
- How Council balances private development interests with neighbour impacts, infrastructure capacity, environmental values, safety, settlement patterns and broader community outcomes
- The proportion of applications that are ultimately approved or approved following minor changes or conditions.
- How transparent assessment guides, as recommended in this report, can provide the community with greater visibility of how recurring planning matters are considered, how discretion is applied and how decisions are made to support fair and consistent outcomes.
- The role of appeal and review processes in testing decisions, improving practice and ensuring planning decisions continue to operate within the legislative framework and community expectations.

The intent is not to dismiss community concerns or defend the current process uncritically. Rather, it is to improve public understanding of the planning system, reinforce confidence in evidence-based decision-making, and provide clearer information about how Council is improving consistency, transparency and customer experience.

Benefit

- Improved public understanding of the role and purpose of the planning process.
- Clearer explanation of how planning decisions balance social, economic and environmental considerations
- Reduced risk of misinformation or perception-based concerns undermining confidence in the planning function.
- Stronger public visibility of the high proportion of applications that are approved or approved following appropriate changes or conditions.
- Better distinction between dissatisfaction with an individual outcome and evidence of a flawed process
- Improved transparency around how planning discretion, assessment guides and assessment principles are applied.
- Stronger alignment between internal process improvement and external community confidence.
- Improved confidence in Council's role as a fair, evidence-based and transparent planning authority.

19. Recommendations Matrix and Implementation Plan

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
1	Workforce Stabilisation and Capacity Strategy	Establish an Interim Capacity Stabilisation Strategy to Reduce Consultant Reliance and Stabilise the Planning Workforce	Workforce Planning	High	Medium	1-12 Months		-	High
2	Workforce Stabilisation and Capacity Strategy	Clarify the Planning Operating Model, Role Accountabilities and Business Continuity	Operating Model	High	Low	1-2 Weeks		-	High
3	Workforce Stabilisation and Capacity Strategy	Establish Agreed Operational Success Metrics and Performance Reporting	Performance Management & Reporting	High	Medium	1-2 Months		15, 35, 38, 41, 43	High
4	Workforce Stabilisation and Capacity Strategy	Investigate AI-Enabled Planning Assessment Support During the Tasmanian Planning Scheme Transition	Technology	High	High	6-12 Months+	IT	-	High
5	Pre-Application: Planning Application Research	Re-organise Kingborough Development Website Content Around Customer Tasks	Content Management	High	Medium	3-6 Months	Web Designer, Content Manager	-	High
6	Pre-Application: Planning Application Research	Introduce Guided Customer Journeys to the Kingborough Development Website	Content Management	High	Medium	3-6 Months	Web Designer, Content Manager	5	High

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
7	Pre-Application: Planning Application Research	Simplify Online Language and Reduce Planning Jargon	Content Management	Medium	Low	1-3 Months		-	Medium
8	Pre-Application: Planning Application Research	Improve Planning Webpage Information Layout and Navigation	Content Management	High	Low	1-3 Months	Web Designer, Content Manager	-	High
9	Pre-Application: Planning Application Research	Establish a Customer Journey Governance and Continuous Improvement Process	Governance, Process & Technology	High	Medium	1-3 Months		6	High
10	Pre-Application: Planning Application Research	Develop an AI-Enabled Planning Information Assistant Aligned to the Incoming Tasmanian Planning Scheme	Communication and Technology	High	High	6-12 Months	IT	-	High
11	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	Establish a Defined Pre-Lodgement Service Model	Communication , Operating Model & Process	High	Low	1-2 Weeks	Customer Service	-	High
12	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	Implement Managed Appointment Scheduling for Pre-Lodgement Advice	Communication , Operating Model & Process	High	Low	1 Month	O365 Training & Development	11	High

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
13	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	Establish Customer Service as a Centralised Digital Navigation Support Channel	Communication , Operating Model & Process	High	Low	1-2 Weeks	Customer Service	6, 12	High
14	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	Email Service Expectations, Workflow Capture and Service Model Alignment	Communication , Operating Model & Process	Medium	Low	1-2 Weeks		12	Medium
15	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	Establish Pre-Lodgement Service Standards and Performance KPIs	Performance Management & Reporting	High	Low	1-2 Weeks	Pathway Training & Development	11	High
16	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	Establish a Formal Pre-Lodgement Pathway for Significant or Complex Developments	Communication , Operating Model & Process	High	Low	1-2 Months	Relevant Departments	12	High
17	Pre-Application: Pre-lodgement Enquiries	AI-Enabled Voice Service for Routine Pre-Lodgement Enquiries	Communication and Technology	Medium	Low	1-3 Months	IT	10, 12	Low
18	Lodgement: Complete A Planning Application Form	Strengthen Visibility of Application Information Requirements and Expectations at Lodgement	Content Management	Low	Low	1-2 Weeks		-	Low

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
19	Lodgement: Complete A Planning Application Form	Introduce a Digital Planning Application Form	Technology	High	Medium	1-3 Months	IT	5	High
20	Lodgement: Complete A Planning Application Form	Introduce a Digital Planning Customer Portal	Communication and Technology	High	High	6-12 Months	IT	19	High
21	Lodgement: Preliminary Assessment	Establish a Centralised Departmental Knowledge Hub	Content Management	High	Low	1-2 Weeks	O365 Training & Development	-	High
22	Lodgement: Preliminary Assessment	Establish a Centralised Learning and Development Hub	Content Management	High	Low	1-2 Weeks	O365 Training & Development	21	High
23	Lodgement: Case Management Job Creation and Invoicing	Establish Council's Case Management System as the Single Source of Truth for Application Tasks and Notifications	Process	Low	Low	1-2 Weeks		-	Low
24	Lodgement: Application Assignment	Remove Default Internal Referrals and Introduce Referral Triage Rules	Operating Model and Process	Medium	Low	1 Month	Planning Support	25	Medium

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
25	Lodgement: Application Assignment	Establish Capability-Based Allocation and Planner Development Profiles	Development & Process	Medium	Low	1 Month		-	Medium
26	Lodgement: Acknowledgement Letter	Introduce a Payment Confirmation Control Before Issuing Referrals	Operating Model and Process	Medium	Low	1 Month	Planning Support	-	Medium
27	Lodgement: Acknowledgement Letter	Establish a Formal Payment Follow-Up Process for Unpaid Applications	Communication and Process	Low	Low	1 Month	Planning Support	-	Low
28	Lodgement: Acknowledgement Letter	Formalise the Response for Unpaid Applications	Process	Low	Medium	1 Month	Planning Support	-	Low
29	Lodgement: Acknowledgement Letter	Enhance File Management and Storage Using Modern Digital Systems	Process	Medium	Low	1 Week	Planning Support	-	Medium
30	Assessment: Initial Assessment	Define Internal Assessment Guides	Content Management and Process	High	Medium	1-2 Months	O365 Training & Development, Relevant Departments	-	High
31	Assessment: Initial Assessment	Strengthen Team Leader Coaching to Support Professional Judgement	Development	High	Low	1-2 Months		-	High

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
32	Assessment: Initial Assessment	Establish the Development Checklist as the Central Assessment Record	Process	Medium	Low	1 Week		-	Medium
33	Assessment: Initial Assessment	Review and Standardise Assessment Templates and Condition Libraries	Content Management	Medium	Medium	1-3 Months	O365 Training & Development, Planning Coordinator	21	Medium
34	Assessment: Initial Assessment	Ensure Statutory Timeframe and Action Date Management is With One System	Technology	Low	Medium	1 Month	IT	-	Low
35	Assessment: Initial Referral Assessment	Define Internal Referral Assessment Service Level Agreements	Performance Management	Medium	Low	1 Month	Relevant Departments	-	Medium
36	Customer Service Enquiries: Post-Lodgement Enquiries	Implement Managed Appointment Scheduling for Post-Lodgement Customer Enquiries	Communication , Operating Model and Process	Medium	Low	1 Week	O365 Training & Development	-	Medium
37	Request for Information: Review Application Documentation for Information Gaps	Reduce Avoidable RFIs	Development and Process	High	Low	1 Month		-	High

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
38	Request for Information: Review Application Documentation for Information Gaps	Establish an Internal RFI Issue Target to Improve Timeliness and Create Statutory Buffer	Performance Management and Reporting	Medium	Low	1 Week		-	Medium
39	Request for Information: Review Application Documentation for Information Gaps	Improve Communication Through Plain-Language Templates and AI-Assisted Drafting	Communication , Development and Process	Medium	Low	1 Month	O365 Co-Pilot Training	-	Medium
40	Request for Information: RFI Approval	Establish a System-Driven RFI Approval Workflow	Quality and Development	High	Medium	1 Month	O365 Training & Development	-	High
41	Request for Information: RFI Approval	Establish RFI Approval Quality and Efficiency Measures	Performance Management and Reporting	High	Low	2-3 Weeks		38	High
42	Advertising Period: Post Site Notices	Delegate Routine Site Notice Posting to Planning Support	Operating Model and Process	Low	Low	1-2 Weeks	Planning Support	-	Low
43	Detailed Assessment: Application Report and Approval	Establish an Internal Application Report Completion Target to Improve Timeliness and Create Statutory Buffer	Performance Management and Reporting	High	Low	2-3 Weeks		-	High

#	Process	Recommendation	Category	Impact	Effort	Timeframe	Support	Dependency	Priority
44	Council Referral: Council Review and Determination	Establish a Routine Pre-Meeting Question Protocol for Council Review Matters	Governance and Process	Medium	Low	2-3 Weeks	Elected Members	-	High
45	Council Referral: Council Review and Determination	Improve Public Communication on the Role, Outcomes and Transparency of the Planning Process	Communication	High	Low	1-2 Months	Social Community Manager	-	High

Appendix 1 – Development Assessment in Tasmania

Development assessment in Tasmania operates within a detailed statutory framework established by State legislation and planning instruments. Local councils act as Planning Authorities and are responsible for administering and applying these requirements. However, the rules that determine whether development can be approved are largely prescribed by the Tasmanian Parliament and the statewide planning system.

This context is important when reviewing Council's planning function, including its efficiency, consistency, timeliness and customer experience. The complexity of the statutory framework does not explain every performance issue, but it does define the operating environment within which planning decisions are made. Within that framework, Council should still strive to deliver planning services as efficiently, consistently and effectively as possible.

The Tasmanian Planning System

The primary legislation governing land use planning and development assessment in Tasmania is the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993 (LUPAA). LUPAA establishes the statutory planning system, development assessment processes, appeal rights and procedural requirements.

Each municipal area is covered by a Local Provisions Schedule, which forms part of the Tasmanian Planning Scheme. The scheme includes common State Planning Provisions and local zoning maps, overlays and provisions approved through a statutory process.

Councils do not create or alter planning controls when assessing individual applications. Their role is to apply State-approved legislation and planning scheme provisions consistently and lawfully.

What Constitutes Development?

Under LUPAA, development is broadly defined and generally includes the use or development of land, construction or alteration of buildings and works, changes in land or building use, subdivisions and other prescribed activities. The planning system also distinguishes between a "use" and "development": use describes the purpose of land or buildings, while development refers to the physical changes made to the land or structures themselves including constructing, demolishing, altering, decorating, relocating or displaying buildings, structures or signs; subdividing or consolidating land, buildings or airspace; and changing the natural or existing condition of land through activities such as earthworks, changes to topography, or the removal, destruction or lopping of trees, vegetation or topsoil.

Exemptions and Permit Requirements

Not all activities require a planning permit. The Tasmanian Planning Scheme includes exemptions for certain uses and development where specified criteria are met. However, determining whether an exemption applies can be complex because requirements may depend on location, scale, dimensions, boundaries, environmental constraints, heritage, infrastructure or overlays.

An activity that appears exempt under one provision may still require a permit if another zone, code, overlay or planning provision modifies or overrides that exemption. As a result, assessment often requires professional judgement, site information, plans, technical reports or specialist advice.

Landowner Consent

All development applications require landowner consent (including Council and/or state if applicable) before they can proceed. Consent confirms the owner is aware of, and authorises, lodgement of the application; it does not indicate planning support for the proposal.

Determining Development Type

A key early step is correctly identifying the proposed use and development. This is not based on opinion; the Tasmanian Planning Scheme contains statutory definitions that must be applied consistently across the State, with guidance from TASCAT and court decisions where relevant.

Once the use is identified, the Planning Authority determines the development status under the relevant zone. Uses may be no permit required, permitted, discretionary or prohibited. Discretionary applications generally require broader assessment and public notification, while prohibited uses cannot be approved regardless of merit.

Assessment Against Planning Scheme Standards

Once the development type is determined, the proposal is assessed against all relevant planning scheme provisions, including zone standards, overlays, codes, specific area plans and general provisions.

Most standards include two assessment pathways: Acceptable Solutions, which are prescriptive requirements, and Performance Criteria, which allow an alternative approach where the applicant demonstrates the planning objective is achieved. Performance-based assessment often requires professional judgement using the application of established planning principles, technical analysis and specialist supporting information such as traffic or bushfire reports.

Merit-Based Assessment and Limits to Standardisation

Each application must be assessed on its merits and in its full site and statutory context. Relevant considerations may include the applicable zone, overlays and codes, land characteristics and hazards, surrounding land uses and values, the scale and design of the proposal, and any representations received during public notification.

Because these factors vary from site to site and proposal to proposal, assessment outcomes and information requirements will also vary. This means that full standardisation, or detailed upfront advice about likely outcomes, is often not possible at the enquiry stage. More detailed plans, supporting reports and proposal design are usually required before reliable advice can be given.

Information Requirements and Referrals

Planning assessments require sufficient and reliable information. Where material is incomplete, inaccurate or deficient, the Planning Authority may request further information to ensure decisions are based on adequate evidence. It is quite common for the design of a proposal to change during assessment, and this can 're-trigger' the need for updated information to assess the amended proposal.

Applications are also routinely referred to internal and external specialists, including traffic engineers, environmental health officers, environmental officers, TasWater, TasNetworks, the Crown and relevant State agencies. These referrals ensure infrastructure, environmental, public health and safety matters are appropriately considered.

Public Notification, Decision Making and Appeals

Discretionary applications are required to be publicly notified under LUPAA. Representations received within the statutory period must be considered, but decisions cannot be based solely on the number of objections. The Planning Authority must assess whether issues raised are relevant planning matters under the planning scheme.

LUPAA also establishes statutory timeframes for assessment and determination, although timeframes may be extended where further information or other statutory processes are required. Most applications are determined by delegated officers, but applications with more than two representations are generally referred to the elected Council for decision.

Permits, Conditions and Other Approvals

Where an application is approved, a planning permit is issued. Permits often include conditions relating to matters such as stormwater, access, technical standards, public safety or referral authority requirements.

Applicants and representors generally have appeal rights to the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (TASCAT). Tribunal decisions provide independent merits

review and contribute to planning precedent that guides consistent interpretation of planning provisions.

Building and Plumbing Approvals

A planning permit is often only one part of the broader approval process. Building and plumbing permits may also be required under the *Building Act 2016* to assess construction, structural, fire safety, plumbing and related standards. Obtaining planning approval does not remove the need to satisfy these separate legislative requirements.

The Complexity of Development Assessment

Development assessment is a specialised professional discipline involving planning law, statutory interpretation, policy analysis, environmental management, engineering principles and administrative law. Council officers do not create the rules that govern individual applications. Their role is to apply State legislation, planning scheme provisions, established planning principles and technical evidence in a fair, consistent and legally defensible manner.

Planning and development assessment functions are among the most visible and frequently scrutinised responsibilities undertaken by local government. Research and experience across Tasmania and Australia consistently demonstrate that planning decisions often generate strong community interest because they directly affect people's homes, neighbourhoods, businesses, property values, views, amenity and local environment.

Another common perception is that planning assessments involve unnecessary bureaucracy or excessive regulation. While planning processes can at times appear complex, much of that complexity reflects the need to balance competing interests, including private property rights, public safety, environmental protection, infrastructure capacity, neighbourhood amenity, natural hazards, heritage values and the long-term strategic development of communities.

As a result, planning is often one of the council functions most likely to attract public criticism, regardless of whether a proposal is approved or refused. Applicants may be frustrated when a proposal is delayed, conditions are imposed, or approval is refused. Conversely, neighbours and community members may be dissatisfied when a proposal is approved despite objections being received.

Failure to properly assess applications or follow statutory procedures can expose councils to appeals, legal challenge, reputational damage and potential liability. For this reason, many aspects that appear subjective such as use classification, assessment standards, and requests for technical information, are governed by legislation, planning scheme definitions and legal precedent rather than council preference.