

GOVERNANCE STRATEGY



Delivering an effective,
accountable and sustainable Council
that serves the community



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Recognition of the Cammeraygal People

We respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of North Sydney local government area (LGA), the Cammeraygal people

We recognise the Cammeraygal people as the Traditional Owners of the area known today as North Sydney.

We acknowledge that the alienation of Cammeraygal Country followed the first local land grant in 1794 which occurred without consultation, treaty or compensation.

Western archaeological evidence shows that Aboriginal people lived in the North Sydney area at least 5,800 years ago, and likely for thousands more. That evidence is precious. We seek to preserve it and through that to better understand Cammeraygal connection to Country.

After North Sydney Council was formed in 1890 through the merging of three boroughs, the word Cammeraygal was included on its coat of arms. Today it holds a central position in the Council's logo as a reminder of the long and ongoing Indigenous heritage of this place.

In recent years the spelling of Cammeraygal has varied to include Gammaraigal and Gai-maragal as our community has sought to reflect and honour the heritage of First Nations people in a more culturally appropriate manner.

Mayor's message

In February this year, I presented a Mayoral Minute to Council that, given the experience of the North Sydney Olympic Pool redevelopment, sought to strengthen Council governance and decision-making frameworks to guide all decisions of Council, no matter how large or small. My goal was to ensure transparency, accountability and long-term financial sustainability. That is, to ensure that the bad governance and decision-making around the pool redevelopment project would never be repeated.

Evidence-based decision-making and transparent, accountable governance are now more important than ever – they are fundamental to sustaining a well-functioning and strong community. It is vital that Council focus on transparency, integrity and good governance with an unrelenting focus on the needs and expectations of our community. That is the cornerstone of fostering trust between the Council and our residents, and ensures that services and resources are managed effectively for the long-term benefit of the community.

This Governance Strategy responds to that Mayoral Minute and provides a comprehensive roadmap for how we will deliver our vision of being an effective, transparent, accountable and sustainable Council that serves the community.

It sets out clear strategic priorities, including the establishment of transparent and measurable goals, promoting active community engagement in decision-making, responsibly fulfilling regulatory obligations, and striving for continuous service enhancement. Key initiatives such as detailed service unit planning, the rollout of a Customer Experience Strategy, implementing a robust project management framework, and strengthening the Council's risk management framework will underpin good governance practices and equip us to meet future needs.

North Sydney Council is committed to embedding best practices in governance, upholding these strategic priorities, and building on our long-standing legacy of public service, open and transparent government, robust public participation and civic responsibility.

I urge you to continue to actively participate in our community and hold Council to account. We can only address local issues effectively and ensure that North Sydney Council is an effective, transparent, accountable and sustainable local government that serves the community with your support and participation.



Introduction

As North Sydney Council embarks on a journey of continuous improvement and innovation, our Governance Strategy outlines a clear framework to guide our operations and decision-making processes. At the heart of our approach lies a commitment to transparency, accountability and community engagement, ensuring that every action we take aligns with our overarching outcome of **building an effective, accountable and sustainable Council that serves the community**.

To realise this outcome, this strategy includes the following strategic directions:



Develop clear goals, create a plan to achieve them, and track progress with transparency and honesty.



Put community needs at the core of everything we do and deliver excellent customer service.



Make it easy for our community to engage and participate in decision-making.



Manage risks and maintain independent oversight in business operations and decision-making.



Exercise regulatory compliance responsibilities diligently to protect the environment and support our community.



Commit to efficiency and value for money in service delivery.



Build a resilient, inclusive and empowered workforce that is committed to delivering community outcomes.



Manage Council's finances through robust long-term planning and ongoing financial management.

Background

The Governance Strategy was instigated in February 2024 in response to ongoing issues associated with the North Sydney Olympic Pool project. This project has demonstrated the critical role effective governance plays in the management of public funds and provision of services and infrastructure for the community.

When governance operates smoothly, it often goes unnoticed and undervalued. This oversight can result in insufficient focus and investment in the systems and structures that underpin good governance, ultimately undermining its effectiveness.

A review of the Council's governance and administration has identified a significant opportunity to enhance processes, systems and frameworks, aimed at ensuring stronger decision-making, improved service delivery, and renewal and development of important community infrastructure.

A program of work is already underway, with the following key initiatives having been undertaken to date:

- In 2023, a major review and realignment of Council's organisational structure was completed.
- In 2023, a culture survey was undertaken to inform organisational improvement initiatives.
- In 2024, an extensive community engagement program titled 'Have your say on North Sydney's next ten years' was undertaken to involve the community in developing key priorities for the future.
- In 2024, Council commenced a program of process mapping to streamline processes and identify priorities for system improvement.
- In 2024, research papers were developed to inform clear directions for North Sydney's future, concentrating on Culture and Creativity, Social Inclusion, Integrated Transport, Open Space and Recreation, and Economic Development.

This Governance Strategy is part of a suite of informing strategies (see Figure 1) that articulates North Sydney's needs and priorities over the next ten years. These strategies will form the basis for Council's new Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2025-2035, Delivery Programs and Operational Plans.



Figure 1: Suite of Informing Strategies

Development of the Governance Strategy

The Governance Strategy focuses primarily on internal governance structures and processes, which are guided by established regulations and best practices. The draft was prepared using insights from a workshop with Council's leadership team, a review of relevant legislation, and research that included consideration of best practices within both the public and private sectors.

About this strategy

The Governance Strategy details how we will deliver the outcome of:

An effective, accountable and sustainable Council that serves the community

Principles

The strategy is guided by the following principles:



TRANSPARENCY

Ensuring openness in decision-making and accessibility of information to build trust among stakeholders.



INTEGRITY

Promoting ethical standards, honesty and strong moral principles.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Ensuring leaders and staff are responsible for their actions and decisions, fostering trust and reliability.



PARTICIPATION

Encouraging stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes to foster inclusivity and representation.



RESPONSIVENESS

Addressing stakeholder needs and concerns in a timely and effective manner.



SUSTAINABILITY

Making decisions that consider long-term impacts.



EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Using resources wisely to achieve desired outcomes and meet community needs.

Structure

The strategy includes eight strategic directions with clear measurable objectives, that outline how we will strive to be **an effective, accountable and sustainable Council that serves the community**.

Under each direction are specific projects and initiatives that will help us achieve the objectives. There is also a list of Council's existing services that support each strategic direction.

Figure 2 illustrates the structure of the informing strategy.



Figure 2: Structure of the Governance Strategy

Timing and delivery of new projects and initiatives will be dependent on availability of funding from a variety of sources, including but not limited to grants, developer contributions and Council's internal reserves.



DELIVERING THE OUTCOME

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Sydney, Australia. The top half shows a dense urban skyline with numerous high-rise buildings, including the distinctive glass skyscraper of the Sydney Stock Exchange. A multi-lane highway runs horizontally across the middle. The bottom half shows a waterfront area with a marina filled with sailboats, residential houses with red-tiled roofs, and green spaces. The overall scene is a mix of urban development and natural elements.

OUTCOME
An effective, accountable and sustainable
Council that serves the community

OBJECTIVE

🎯 Increase the percentage of residents who are at least somewhat satisfied with Council's long-term planning to 75% by 2029 from a 2023 baseline of 71%*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1: Develop clear goals, create a plan to achieve them, and track progress with transparency and honesty

1.1 Undertake comprehensive service unit planning across the organisation to clarify responsibilities, develop clear operational goals, and ensure that Council's services align with the priorities in the adopted Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

1.2 Develop and implement a fully integrated planning framework that uses Informing Strategies and service unit planning to link Council's day-to-day operations with delivering measurable results for the community.

1.3 Develop a public dashboard for reporting of Council's performance against the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

1.4 Update Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement to reflect changing needs and priorities.



1.5 Develop and implement a program for reviewing Council's plans of management and develop a prioritised list of projects for implementation.



1.6 Develop an advocacy framework that details how Council will proactively and reactively advocate to support delivery of strategic priorities.

Service Set a clear strategic direction for Council and oversee business operations.

Service Comply with Integrated Planning and Reporting requirements. This includes updating the community on Council's progress in implementing our Delivery Program and Operational Plan, and working with the community to update and create new programs and plans.

Service Manage strategic land use planning in the LGA including advocacy, stakeholder management, and preparation of land use policies, strategies, plans and controls. This also includes maintaining Council's property database.



Service Develop plans of management for Council-owned and/or managed land, and undertake regulatory land administration functions.



Shared projects, initiatives and services

Some projects, initiatives and services contribute to the delivery of outcomes from multiple Informing Strategies. These are indicated using symbols (see below) representing the other strategies that include the same activity.



Culture and Creativity



Integrated Transport



Social Inclusion



Economic Development



Environment



Housing



Governance



Open Space and Recreation

* Source: Customer Satisfaction Survey (Micromex Research)

OBJECTIVE

🎯 Increase the percentage of residents who are at least somewhat satisfied with customer service/information provided by Council staff to >90% by 2029 from a 2023 baseline of 87%*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2: Put community needs at the core of everything we do and deliver excellent customer service

- 2.1 Develop and implement a Customer Experience Strategy.
- 2.2 Deliver a Customer Relationship Management system(s).
- 2.3 Undertake the biennial community satisfaction survey.
- 2.4 Deliver Council's Service Review Program.
- 2.5 Review the framework and system for Council's grants and subsidies program to ensure alignment with Council's strategic outcomes.

Service Implement initiatives to ensure continuous improvement across the organisation, including process mapping and service level reviews.

Service Provide assistance and advice to customers in person (through our Customer Service Centre), over the phone (through our call centre) and online.

Service Process a range of applications and permits, including resident and visitor parking permits, animal registrations, pensioner concession rebates, outdoor dining and goods display permits, and kayak storage permits.

Service Manage the hire and use of Council spaces and places, including buildings, facilities, civic spaces, parks, reserves and sportsfields.



* Source: Customer Satisfaction Survey (Micromex Research)


OBJECTIVES


🎯 Increase the percentage of residents who are at least somewhat satisfied with Council's consultation with the community to >85% by 2029 from a 2023 baseline of 80%*

🎯 Increase the percentage of residents who are at least somewhat satisfied with Council's communication with residents to >85% by 2029 from a 2023 baseline of 84%*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3: Make it easy for our community to engage and participate in decision-making

- 3.1 Review the Community Engagement Strategy every four years in accordance with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines.


- 3.2 Utilise a demographically select working group for input on major Council decisions to ensure the diverse needs of the North Sydney community are considered. 


- 3.3 Develop and implement opportunities for young people in the community to have input into Council's decision-making processes, including through formal consultations, social media and surveys. 


- 3.4 Review the advisory committee framework to better leverage the diverse knowledge and experience of the community in pursuing our strategic directions.

- 3.5 Update Council's submission management procedures to make all submissions that inform decision-making publicly available, unless specifically excluded under legislation.

- 3.6 Undertake a review of Council's Access to Information Policy every four years.

- 3.7 Work with First Nations community members to develop a First Nations advisory committee. 

- Service** Provide information to the community on Council's services and activities through a range of channels including print, digital, social media and in person. 

- Service** Develop and implement opportunities for community and business input into Council's decision-making processes, including through formal consultations, Precinct Committees, social media and surveys. 

* Source: Customer Satisfaction Survey (Micromex Research)

OBJECTIVE

🎯 Increase the percentage of residents who agree or strongly agree that Council operates under ethical, open, accountable and transparent processes to >75% by 2029 from a 2023 baseline of 57%*

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4: Manage risks and maintain independent oversight in business operations and decision-making


- 4.1 Review current Council meeting and briefing procedures to ensure alignment with industry best practice.
- 4.2 Develop and implement a revised enterprise risk management framework focusing on Council's proactive assessment and management of operational and strategic risks.
- 4.3 Review the internal audit model to evaluate compliance with best practice and value for money.
- 4.4 Investigate the feasibility of implementing a risk and audit management system to enable the recording and tracking of risk and audit actions.
- 4.5 Undertake an annual review of the role and effectiveness of the Audit Risk and Improvement Committee.
- 4.6 Participate in Statewide's Continuous Improvement Program.
- 4.7 Ensure that all submissions made to the Office of Local Government under the Public Expenditure Guidelines are peer reviewed prior to submission.
- 4.8 Undertake a review of Council's Code of Conduct every four years.
- 4.9 Undertake a review of Council's Fraud and Corruption Prevention Policy and Gifts and Benefits Policy every four years.
- 4.10 Undertake Councillor training and professional development each year to support informed and ethical decision-making.
- 4.11 Develop emergency response and preparedness resources.
- 4.12 Investigate solutions to reduce flooding around St Leonards Park.
- Service** Oversee Council's governance activities to ensure accountability, transparency and compliance with all relevant laws, codes and directions.
- Service** Ensure that the Mayor and Councillors are given timely information, advice and support necessary to effectively discharge their civic duties.
- Service** Manage Council's shared internal audit function to ensure risk management controls are working.
- Service** Develop and maintain Council's enterprise risk management framework including management of claims and insurance cover.
- Service** Implement flood mitigation projects and strategies identified through floodplain planning.
- Service** Ensure effective identification and management of hazards and risks to stakeholder health and safety.
- Service** Provide legal advice and support on matters related to Council's duties and responsibilities.
- Service** Manage the planning, response and recovery for emergency situations within the LGA.

* Source: Customer Satisfaction Survey (Micromex Research)


OBJECTIVE


🎯 Meet 100% of legislative compliance obligations each year

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5: Exercise regulatory compliance responsibilities diligently to protect the environment and support our community


- 5.1 Implement a system for monitoring legislative compliance.
- 5.2 Undertake an annual review of delegations to ensure appropriate decision-making.
- 5.3 Undertake a review of Council's Compliance and Enforcement Policy and Legislative Compliance Policy every four years.
- 5.4 Implement a development application management platform to streamline the submission, assessment and approval process for development applications.
- 5.5 Implement changes, as required, to ensure compliance with the ministerial order regarding determination times for development applications and planning proposals. 

Service Implement Council's responsibilities under the *Companion Animals Act 1998* for the registration, management and regulation of dogs and cats in the LGA.

Service Enforce legislation regarding public use of Council's parks, roads, reserves, property assets and other public places. 

Service Enforce legislation relating to parking in the LGA, including responding to parking-related customer complaints and enquiries. 


Service Enforce compliance with out of hours building work requirements.

Service Implement compliance programs, activities and regulatory actions to help prevent and manage environmental pollution caused by development activities and business operations. 

Service Implement compliance programs, activities and regulatory actions to help protect public health and amenity.

Service Manage building and development compliance programs and activities in accordance with legislation including advice, approvals, investigations and regulatory action.

Service Manage building approvals, inspections and certifications including issuing Building Information Certificates, Subdivision Works Certificates, Subdivision Certificates, Complying Development Certificates, Construction Certificates, Occupation Certificates and S88B Certificates.

Service Assess and determine development applications, modification applications and review applications under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*. 

Service Assess and provide advice on major development proposals when Council is not the consent authority.

Service Assess other development-related applications including Local Approval applications, *Roads Act* applications and heritage exemption requests.

OBJECTIVE

🎯 Deliver benefits realisation of at least \$20m through continuous improvement initiatives by 2035

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 6: Commit to efficiency and value for money in service delivery

6.1 Investigate the implementation of a data and analytics platform to enable data-driven decision-making to improve business operations.

6.2 Develop a framework for measuring the value of system and process improvements.

6.3 Implement a new or upgraded enterprise resource planning system to streamline operations, enhance efficiency, and improve service delivery. This includes records management, field technology provision and process automation.

6.4 Review Council accommodation and technology to ensure an effective workplace environment and alignment with new ways of working following the COVID pandemic.

6.5 Review the operational requirements of Council's depot and develop an options report for ongoing use and management. The report should consider safety, function and cost.

6.6 Develop and implement a program evaluation framework to assess whether programs are delivering value and determine whether they should be continued.

Service Implement and maintain information management systems and processes to support Council's operations.

Service Develop, implement and maintain technologies to support Council's day-to-day operation and digital transformation.

Service Monitor organisational performance to identify potential barriers to attaining strategic outcomes, and collaborate with teams to analyse and address issues.

OBJECTIVE

🎯 Achieve above the 50th percentile for all constructive culture behaviours in the human synergistic model by 2035

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 7: Build a resilient, inclusive and empowered workforce that is committed to delivering community outcomes

- 7.1 Implement a 'personal best' performance and development system to enhance workforce capacity and performance.
- 7.2 Develop and implement a leadership development program.
- 7.3 Deliver staff training to support development of a skilled workforce.
- 7.4 Develop and implement a staff engagement framework to integrate all engagement activities.
- 7.5 Deliver a modern HR information system to streamline HR processes and improve the employee experience.
- 7.6 Explore opportunities to replace Council's intranet with an alternative platform for information sharing.
- 7.7 Develop an employee value proposition to attract and retain high calibre employees.
- 7.8 Deliver a culture survey every four years to measure progress towards the preferred constructive culture.

Service Implement programs and initiatives to support employee development and retention.

Service Manage the attraction, recruitment and onboarding of new employees.

Service Manage the offboarding (separation) process for employees who are leaving Council.

Service Provide regular information to staff about Council's appointments, events, activities and initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

- 🎯 Maintain an operating performance ratio of >2% each year
- 🎯 Maintain an average asset renewal ratio of >100% over a rolling five-year period

STRATEGIC DIRECTION 8: Manage Council's finances through robust long-term planning and ongoing financial management

- 8.1 Prepare a financial strategy to repair Council's financial situation and deliver an operating surplus each year.
- 8.2 Undertake an annual review of Council's Revenue Policy to ensure equitable levying of rates and identification of potential new revenue sources.
- 8.3 Review building assets and commercial property to ensure best value utilisation that aligns with Council's strategic direction.
- 8.4 Review the procurement framework to ensure it is in line with best practice.
- 8.5 Implement a robust project management framework to ensure projects are developed within schedule, budget and scope.
- 8.6 Implement process automation in areas including procurement, finance and reporting to improve efficiency and data quality and reduce risk of manual errors.
- 8.7 Undertake a comprehensive review and assessment of the condition of Council's building assets to inform prioritisation of renewal funding.
- 8.8 Invest a minimum of 100% of asset depreciation into a reserve for allocation towards the capital renewal program from 2027/28 onwards.
- 8.9 Reduce the infrastructure backlog.
- 8.10 Implement an asset management system to provide robust asset management and maintenance capabilities.
- 8.11 Develop a governance and operating model for Berrys Bay Parkland Precinct.

Service Manage and record Council's financial transactions including the levy and collection of rates and charges, and the preparation of financial statements and returns.

Service Prepare, review and maintain Council's long-term financial plan and annual budget to ensure financial sustainability.

Service Manage Council's procurement processes to ensure legislative compliance and best value.

Service Manage Council's property portfolio including affordable housing, commercial property and community facilities.



Service Manage the commercial operations of the North Sydney Olympic Pool facility.

Service Manage the hire and use of the North Sydney Oval and Mollie Dive Function Centre.



Service Manage asset lifecycle planning (including creation, renewal, maintenance and disposal) to ensure sustainable service delivery. This includes development of Council's capital works program.

Service Develop, maintain and monitor Council's developer contributions plans and voluntary planning agreements.

Service Manage the implementation of Council's capital works program including construction and renewal of buildings, footpaths, drainage, parks and other assets.



Service Manage the maintenance of council's civil assets. This includes construction of new and renewed roads, repairs to assets within the road reserve, drainage system clearing and repairs, and maintenance of street and park lighting.



Service Clean, manage and maintain Council-owned buildings, plant, fleet and facilities, including providing security and civic support.

