

MEDIA RELEASE

27 June, 2025

MEETING BRIEFS - ORDINARY MEETING HELD 25 JUNE 2025

OPERATIONAL PLAN AND BUDGET ADOPTED

Norfolk Island Regional Council has adopted the 2025-2026 Operational Plan and Budget.

The draft plan was developed under the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework, which considers the aspirations of the community, rather than Council's. Using this framework, NIRC staff conducted an enormous amount of work to ensure that the community had access to the widest range of operational considerations and issues during the consultation period.

The draft operational plan and budget was originally presented to Council at the 17 April meeting, where it was endorsed for public exhibition through to 15 May 2025. The public submissions received during this period were considered in a review of the draft plan, with many amendments resulting directly from this community's input.

Recognition of the place of the Operational Plan in the IP&R Framework was made. The Framework includes the Community Strategic Plan developed in 2015, which sets out the community's aspirations over a 10-year timeframe, including recognition of various strategic directions across environment, community, cultural heritage, innovation, accountability and health

Financial Administrator Gary Mottau noted the community had a considerable period of time to make submissions about the draft plan.

"Council extended the public exhibition period for the draft operational plan and budget to allow the highest possible response from community, and it's pleasing to see that eleven very good submissions were made during this time.

"The additional time given to the AGM and his team to consolidate the information in the plan and budget with input from community consultation resulted in a highly detailed and fiscally responsible document" Mr Mottau said.

Following the adoption of the Plan and Budget, Lead Administrator Scott Mason said that it was crucial that Council take a no-regrets approach to capital funding decisions.

“While we currently have a sea of opportunities to deploy capital to services that have many individual assets at risk of failure due to the expiry of their useful life, we must be prudent when it comes to the allocation of finite resources.

“I encourage the organisation to take a dynamic approach to planning and operations, to carefully consider new information as it comes to light so that the best outcomes to our challenges, both operationally and financially, are guaranteed,” Mr Mason said.

000 EMERGENCY NETWORK – WORK IN PROGRESS

The continued technology problems causing the failure of Norfolk Island’s 000 emergency telephone network now involve a global effort, with the engineers working on the issue with advice from remote overseas experts.

On-island engineers from Blue Arcus, the primary telecommunications contractor for Norfolk Telecom, are tackling the problems with technical advice from Redcom Laboratories, whose Softswitch technology is a central component of the 000 system.

Three issues have been identified, with two of those directly impacting the service. Troubleshooting them is proving to be a difficult operation. One is the Dual-tone Multi Frequency (DTMF) feature, which provides a touch tone for making a selection (for example, pressing 1 for ambulance).

The other is the “comfort noise” feature, which aims to give callers reassurance that their call is still connected when there is no active dialogue. The feature is overriding voice audibility, impacting the call if it needs to connect to an emergency service via Softswitch.

Details of the alternative numbers to be called in the event of an emergency are being distributed to visitors on their arrival, at their accommodation, announced daily on local radio, texted daily to Norfolk Telecom users and available on the NIRC website and facebook page.

Lead Administrator Scott Mason sought advice from Acting General Manager Philip Reid about Australian Government assistance, who confirmed that technical and hardware support had been offered.

Financial Administrator Gary Mottau noted that there was more work to be done to give Council and the community confidence that the technology could be relied upon.

The alternative emergency numbers to call are:

- Ambulance - 23333
- Police - 22222
- Fire - 22049

RESIGNATION OF ACTING GENERAL MANAGER

Administrators Scott Mason and Gary Mottau have accepted the resignation of Acting General Manager, Philip Reid. Mr Reid and his family will move to Tasmania in September.

Lead Administrator Scott Mason acknowledged the contributions that Philip had made in various roles over the years.

“His efforts are greatly appreciated, and his service has contributed toward the success pathway we are currently on. I know that this has been a difficult decision for him and his family to move on from beautiful Norfolk Island. This move is also a positive opportunity for Phil and his family from a career perspective, and we wish him all the best,” Mr Mason said.

HARDSHIP POLICY SETTINGS DEFERRED

A review of hardship policies, specifically, the policies relating to debt recovery of rates and charges and electricity debt, has been conducted by Council staff and the policies were presented to the meeting for adoption.

Lead Administrator Scott Mason and Financial Administrator Gary Mottau agreed that while they had no issues with the revised policies, the community should have the opportunity to provide feedback on the policy through the standard Public Exhibition process.

Gary Mottau acknowledged that in addition to community consultation for at least 28 days, seeking comment from Council’s Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) during the same public exhibition period would be worthwhile.

Scott Mason said reduction of red tape should be included in the review.

“We should be streamlining the application procedure to ensure that residents who need assistance have a stress-free and simple application. Residents who may already be experiencing financial difficulties don’t need the added stress of a complicated process to access assistance,” he said.

“We should also be making all possible efforts to recover arrears ourselves, with a supportive approach, before outsourcing to off-island debt collection agencies. Keeping the discussions local, unless a satisfactory outcome cannot be achieved.”

The adoption of the policy was deferred until engagement with ARIC and the community concluded.

AUGUST MEETING DATE RESCHEDULED

The date of the August Ordinary Council Meeting has been changed from Wednesday 27 August to now be held on Friday 29 August 2025 at 9am. Council’s website will be amended to reflect the new date.

ENDS