Financial Strategy

Draft

2024-34 Long-term Plan Amendment

Absolutely Positively Wellington City Council
Me Heke Ki Pōneke

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Introduction

The Council's financial and infrastructure strategies are the main foundations for the long-term plan (LTP). The strategies are interdependent in that they together:

- tell a story about the levels of service that are planned, the required infrastructure investment, and the associated costs;
- specify the funding and investment boundaries and/or financial trade-offs in advancing the Council's outcomes, priorities, and proposed levels of service; and
- identify and guide the management of any financial risks to service delivery and the financial health of the Council.

Both strategies respond to the strategic challenges, issues and expectations faced by the city.

This Financial Strategy outlines our overall approach to managing the Council's finances over the next ten years. It provides guidance to manage financial risk, and it explains the effect of spending decisions and funding choices on levels of service, rates, debt, and investments. In the meantime, the funding options available to the Council are limited. We must make careful decisions about what we invest in and when, to provide the required service in the most cost-effective way. We must also ensure that those generations that benefit from the services we provide are the ones that pay for those services.

This strategy also sets the limits (e.g., rates, debt) within which the Council proposes to manage its finances over the life of the LTP.

The Council is committed to responding to the needs of the community in an affordable way as well as funding long-term projects to support its vision: *Poneke: A creative capital where people and nature thrive*. However, the Council faces significant demand for increased investment in its infrastructure while investment capacity is reducing. We must also ensure that those generations that benefit from the services we provide are the ones that pay for those services.

Part 1 - Our investment capacity and infrastructure demands

The biggest challenge for the Council is that our investment capacity is reducing but our infrastructure demands are increasing faster than our ability to fund the required work. Key contributors to this are outlined below.

Investing in the City

The 2021 LTP established a 2040 vision for the City to be 'an inclusive, sustainable and creative capital for people to live work and play'. The 2024 LTP broadly continues this ambitious vision by investing in significantly improving services and infrastructure. We must also focus on accommodating expected growth[1]. We are a compact City, and our district plan looks to accommodate this growth by intensifying existing residential areas. This may see an increase in mixed use properties (e.g., both commercial and residential). We expect no other significant changes in land use. There are minimal operating costs associated with growth and land use change. Capital cost implications are detailed below.

To meet our vision, over the last two LTPs the Council has made strategic decisions to invest in many projects, including core infrastructure, the new build of the Tākina Convention Centre, and reinstating earthquake prone buildings such as the strengthening and modernisation of Te Matapihi Central Library and the upgrade of the Town Hall. This has been funded by taking on additional debt, which has resulted in the Council's debt more than doubling since 2017[2]. While the current debt held by the Council is well within the covenant limits set by the NZ Local Government Funding Agency (who the Council borrows most of its debt from) we are ~~near~~ above the limit of the internal self-imposed debt to revenue cap for the first six years of the LTP. As a result, we need to carefully consider what projects we pursue in the future.

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In this LTP the Council is focused on delivering core services, such as waters and transport. Because of decades of underinvestment in infrastructure and the long tail of earthquake impacts on many key buildings across the city, our required investment in our core assets is significant. Council is committing to 'looking after what we have'. There is little scope for us to significantly increase level of service targets over the next 10 years[3].

Our infrastructure demands

The Council's Infrastructure Strategy (IS) identifies significant needs, challenges and options for managing infrastructure over the next thirty years. The IS signals where asset investment or optimization (including divestment) may be needed.

The IS identifies five infrastructure challenges that are key drivers of the financial sustainability challenges addressed in this strategy:

1. **Population growth and changing demand and expectations**. Wellington has sustained a steady 1.2% population growth per year from 1998 to 2018. The forecast growth rate going forward is lower at 0.8% per year. This will still result in between 50,000 - 80,000 extra people over the next 30 years and requires approximately 24,000-31,000 more housing units. An aging population, changes to household size, more intense and mixed land uses, and accessibility requirements affects the range of infrastructure / services needed while increasing the demands on the

[1] Wellington City's population is forecast to grow 26% between 2021-2054 and the 2021-31 (Sense partners population forecast)
[2] As at 30 June 2017 the Council's borrowings were $582m it is now more than $1.4b
[3] Levels of service are what we have agreed to deliver to, and on behalf of, the community. These are set through the Council's LTP, sometimes in response to community desire, and sometimes in response to statutory requirements.

existing networks across the city. Many infrastructure networks will require more or new investment to support this forecast growth particularly the intensification of existing urban areas and along key public transport corridors as signalled in the Spatial and Proposed District Plans.

2. **The aging and declining condition of our infrastructure portfolio** - in particular water and transport networks. The age, condition and performance of our water assets is under significant stress. These assets, which were designed at a time to service a smaller population, less housing and different weather patterns, require significant on-going investment at a scale far greater than in recent years. Wellington's topography constrains our ability to add or widen corridors for our transport network. This lack of capacity shows up as congestion on the roads and creates safety issues, especially for vulnerable road users. To maximise the safety and efficiency of our network, increase the provision of safe convenient and reliable low carbon transport mode options, relocation of some space away from inefficient private vehicle traffic lanes and parking to higher capacity public transport and active mode corridors. To deliver these changes in our transport system, considerable investment will be required for decades, either through government or some other funding mechanism.

3. **Mitigation and adaptation to climate change.** Much of our infrastructure was planned and built before we considered the impact on carbon emissions. To reach our goal of a 57% reduction in emissions by 2030 and achieve net-zero carbon by 2050, we must rethink and redesign our infrastructure. Climate change is already affecting New Zealand, impacting its natural environment, economy, and communities. Without proactive adaptation, further climate-related changes are expected to significantly impact our infrastructure. ~~Recent~~ Previous weather events underscore the exposure of Wellington's infrastructure to various climate-related impacts, such as extreme weather events, sea level rise, flooding, coastal inundation, erosion, landslides, and rising temperatures. Future costs to the Council for making infrastructure more resilient will be material. Estimates indicate that the cost of not taking action to address climate issues is seven times higher than the cost of safeguarding our current and future infrastructure.

4. **Mitigating earthquake ~~(EQ)~~ hazards, buildings ~~EQ~~ earthquake resilience and insurance cost inflation.** Wellington faces threats from earthquakes, landslides and the effects of climate change. Wellington is a hilly city. It has many bridges and retaining walls, and limited access points - these critical links must be resilient. This means ensuring they can withstand the impact of earthquakes and other natural disasters, so people can continue to access essential services. To be a seismically resilient city, much of our infrastructure needs to be remediated, particularly buildings and facilities. Seismic resilience is also about ensuring safety and access to lifeline services. Many of the Council's buildings are not earthquake-prone, but some are, and require remediation. This includes a few key public use buildings. In this environment, insurers are limiting their exposure to the region's hazards by narrowing cover and/or increasing the cost of cover.

5. **Affordability, funding and market capacity to deliver the require infrastructure investment programme.** The costs associated with maintaining, operating, renewing, and upgrading the Council's significant portfolio of infrastructure are substantial and have been increasing materially since the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding tools are limited, and while the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act 2020 ~~(IFFA)~~ provides an 'off balance sheet' solution not impacting borrowing limits, the costs still fall to the community who themselves are facing cost increases and affordability issues. Added to this, Civil Contractors New Zealand reported that the civil construction industry face major challenges including greater uncertainty for future projects, attracting and retaining skilled people, cost escalations and supply chain issues.

Addressing these challenges has been constrained by a recent history of incomplete asset management, data maturity and under investment in asset maintenance and renewals. Progress has been made to collect more and better information about our assets, particularly our most critical assets. We need to maintain or even increase our investment in this area to ensure we can continue to make good decisions about when investment in our infrastructure is optimal.

The current economic environment

The economic and community operating environment has dramatically changed since the Council prepared its 2021-31 LTP. We are operating in an environment of high inflation, high interest rates and borrowing costs have increased steeply since 2021. Insurance premiums continue to rise while access to insurance for many of Council's assets is becoming more difficult. Put simply, everything we do is costing more to deliver. While the Council's current financial position is strong with a credit rating of AA+ (negative watch) and total assets of over $10b, the Council is now facing and addressing:

- Material near-term cost and affordability challenges; and
- Medium to long-term balance sheet and funding constraints.

Day-to-day costs have also had a significant impact on our community. Households are under financial pressure in this economic environment, with Council's main source of income being rates, careful decisions need to be made about what the community can afford. There is growing community pressure for the Council to live within its means (i.e., deliver affordable services). Successive years of double-digit rates increases are eroding community perceptions of service affordability and rates increase tolerance – particularly as cost-of-living pressures continue.

In 2007 a Local Government rating inquiry report found that as a rough benchmark, affordability problems could arise where rates exceed 5% of gross household income. Wellington City as a whole remains below this indicative benchmark level (even when including the proposed sludge levy). However, rates across Wellington City vary greatly and there are suburbs in Wellington where the 5% affordability benchmark has been reached.

There is no easy solution. High inflation and costs (particularly the cost of borrowing) in the current economic environment is restricting what we can afford to do. The 2023 Future for Local Government review found that local authorities face significant funding challenges constraining their ability to deliver services to their communities, meaning there is limited capacity or resource to work with communities on more complex challenges. It also noted that the current local government funding and financing system is not sustainable[4].

We will work collaboratively with other councils and central government to seek changes to provide a sustainable funding model for local government and support new ways to deliver core services. For example, supporting the establishment of a new style of regional council-controlled organisation that has the mandate and financial sustainability to ensure the provision of a safe, reliable, quality water service for our communities.

In the meantime, the funding options available to the Council are limited. We must make careful decisions about what we invest in and when, to provide the required service in the most cost-effective way.

Managing future risk

While we need to think about the immediate cost pressures, we also need to make sure we can respond to future challenges and natural disasters. Our balance sheet currently lacks the resilience to meet possible future events, which we are looking to address through this financial strategy.

[4] Review into the Future for Local Government (2023) He piki tūranga, he piki kōtuku, Wellington: New Zealand.

The Wellington region has numerous large known faults such as the Wellington and Ohariu faults. The 2022 revision of the National Seismic Hazard Model estimates the likelihood of future earthquake shaking hazard to have increased throughout most of the country. Further, recent weather events in New Zealand have highlighted the impact of a changing climate.

If such an event were to occur in Wellington, we need to have the financial capacity to respond accordingly. The Council's current investment portfolio effectively has two main assets (WIAL shares and ground leases) and is highly exposed to disruptive events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters.

Part 2 – Responding to Council's financial challenges

The Council is committed to responding to the needs of the community and the aspirations for the City's future. The budget and investment programme in the 2024-34 LTP underpins the vision and the nine LTP strategic priorities guiding the Council's LTP work programme.

In addition, the development of this strategy and future financial decision making is informed by the advice of the 2023 Citizens' Assembly Pilot (the Assembly). Relevant recommendations of the Assembly are that the LTP, as part of its medium-term focus, look to diversify revenue streams, advocate to central government for legislation changes to access alternative revenue streams, considers investments and partnerships to supplement rates revenue and prioritising capital spend according to affordability.

In this environment our ability to maintain the pace of delivery for our capital investment programme and maintain prudent financial planning and management is increasingly under pressure. To address these challenges, the Council is planning to:

1. Continue to invest in the city but rephase and reprioritise the capital programme of works, with a focus on completing projects that we have started, looking after our existing assets, and meeting regulatory requirements. The Council is increasing its borrowing capacity by reducing the capital programme over the ten years of the Long-term Plan using these principles.
2. Seek opportunities to increase non-rates revenue and make efficiencies and some reductions in levels of service to manage immediate cost pressures.
3. Make better use of investments to better deal with the risks and external costs pressures more effectively. This includes diversifying the Council's investment portfolio through the creation of a disaster resilience fund. The Council's investment assets are highly concentrated in terms of geography, asset type and liquidity.
4. Look for long-term solutions for local government funding and financing, including continuing to advocate and support change for the establishment of a new style of regional council-controlled organisation that has the mandate and financial sustainability to ensure the provision of a safe, reliable, quality water service for our communities.

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Continued investment in assets

The IS provides details of the level and timing of investment needed to operate, replace, renew and upgrade existing facilities over the next 30 years.

The Council primarily borrows to pay for the construction/purchase of new assets. These assets generally provide new or enhanced benefits to Wellington for many years. Borrowing therefore has the advantage of being a cost-effective and equitable way to fund these assets as it spreads the cost of the asset over the future generations of ratepayers who will benefit from the use of the asset.

If the capital expenditure relates to the replacement (renewal) of an existing asset, that expenditure will be initially funded by borrowings but be repaid by rating for depreciation over the life of the asset. Any surplus rate funded depreciation, after paying for the replacement of Council assets, will be used to repay borrowings.

The increased investment in infrastructure to provide for growth is proposed to be recovered in part through development contributions. However, the Council also funds growth infrastructure through debt. Over time as new lots are created and new houses and apartments are built across Wellington there will also be more properties to share the rates across, reducing the impacts on existing ratepayers.

The Councils capital programme has been updated to reflect the transfer of three waters assets to a regional Councill Controlled Organisation as at 1 July 2026. The Council has also received a reduction in funding from the National Land Transport Plan (NLTP). New Zealand Transport Agency/Waka Kotahi (NZTA Waka Kotahi) approves funding on a three-year cycle based on the Government's priorities for the same period. The funding level approved for one three-year period is not an indication of funding in the future years. The Council has reduced its capital programme to mitigate the loss of funding from the NLTP for the current three year cycle, over the ten years of the plan.

The Council must operate within its debt covenant levels and therefore there are limitations on the level of investment in assets it can undertake based on the amount it can afford to borrow. Due to the significant underinsurance, and a constrained private insurance market, the Council is increasing its borrowing capacity and established a disaster resilience fund to self-insure in the event of a natural disaster. The Council has increased its borrowing capacity over the ten years of the Plan by reducing the capital programme and reducing the self-imposed debt/revenue ratio to 200%.

The Council borrows from the NZ Local Government Funding Agency, who set a debt to revenue ratio covenant of 280%. The Council has set its own debt to revenue ratio limit at 200~~25~~%. The Council's debt to revenue ratio limit has historically included a provision for insurance headroom of $272m. This amount was set in the 2021-31 LTP and reflected the "gap" in insurance coverage available to the Council. The current financial strategy removes~~retains~~ the insurance headroom ~~for the ten years~~from year 2 (2025/26) of this plan. In the event of a natural disaster the Council will have borrowing capacity up to the 280% LGFA limit. By reducing its self-imposed debt/revenue ratio limit, the Council is creating increased headroom to respond in the event of a natural disaster.~~, and reflects the Council's desire to retain borrowing capacity in the case of a shock, particularly until the Council has alternative capacity to respond to such events.~~

The Council's own limit has been set giving regard to:

- The Council having the future cashflows to repay the debt;
- The ability of ratepayers to service debt – including both interest and repayments;
- Having necessary debt facilities, credit rating and security in place, which is achievable over the medium to long-term; and
- Maintaining financial headroom to deal with unknown shocks.

In preparing its 2021-31 LTP, the Council was forecasting to exceed its debt to revenue limit in the first seven years of the plan. While the Council's actual debt to revenue ratio has not exceeded the 225% limit to date, debt has still increased significantly.

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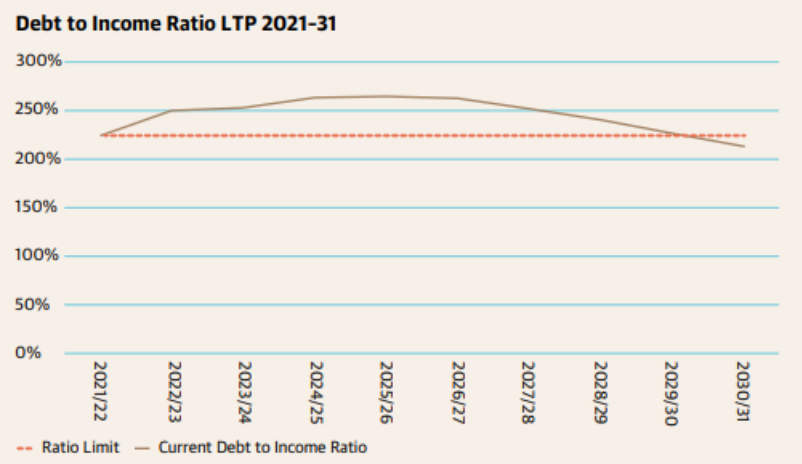
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With significant increases in construction costs, the scope of works being undertaken (for example the cost of the Town Hall remediation being significantly higher than planned) and the size of the Council's capital expenditure programme, the Council is expected to exceed its own debt to revenue limit ~~(including the insurance headroom)~~ in this LTP period. However, there is a need to manage the costs of the Council's future capital programme to ensure that debt can be managed, the Council operates within its own debt to revenue limit over the ten years of the plan, and does not breach the debt to revenue covenants set by the NZ Local Government Funding Agency.

Another critical impact of funding capital expenditure through increasing debt, as well as through depreciation funding, is on future operating expenditure (and therefore on future rates). As both our asset base and our level of debt grows, so do operating costs of debt financing and asset management and renewals. These increasing cost pressures include:

- Increasing interest payments as the debt principal increases
- Increasing depreciation as the value of total assets increases
- Increasing costs of operating costs such as repairs and maintenance and insurance.

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To respond to these pressures and to increase borrowing capacity, the Council has reprioritised and rephased the capital programme using the following principles:

- Complete works underway - examples include things like the Town Hall, Te Matapihi Central Library, parking enforcement technology roll-out etc.
- Deliver what is legislatively or contractually required – examples include Phase 2 of the Housing Upgrade Programme, multi-year contracts, earthquake strengthening; and
- Invest in areas where there are material infrastructure challenges e.g., three waters.

The remaining capital works programme has been rephased, reprioritised and rescoped so that it is evenly distributed over the ten years of the plan or beyond and fits within the available budget parameters.

Growth

Forecasts indicate steadily ageing population and smaller households as family sizes continue to decline. The population is seeing an increasing proportion of people in the 55-to-85-year age brackets, and the 20-to-30-year age group. There is a decreasing proportion of the population in the under 20-year age bracket and the 30-to-50 age group. National population projections from the 2013 disability survey indicated a 45% increase in disabled population to 2038 compared with 31% increase in total population. The same survey indicated nearly 60% of people over 65 identified as disabled. Changing demographics affects the range of services we need to provide and demands on networks across the city – and long-term changes to household size, more intense and mixed land uses, and accessibility requirements.

The Council is planning to accommodate the growth of the city predominantly through intensification of existing urban areas and along key public transport corridors as set out in the Spatial Plan and Proposed District Plan. This will require new infrastructure including higher capacity public transport corridors to sustain growth, and existing infrastructure to be upgraded.

Capital Expenditure

The Council is investing $3.44.9b in its capital programme over the 10-year period of the 2024-34 Long-term Plan. The below table shows the total cost of capital projects over the 10-year period of the 2024-34 Long-term Plan categorised by type of expenditure.

	2024-34 Long-term Plan			
	Renewals	LOS	Growth	Total
Activity Group	**($000's)**	**($000's)**	**($000's)**	**($000's)**
Water supply	168,26425,684	177,1644,029	1,677314	347,10530,027

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Wastewater	~~394,367~~ 62,023	~~482,698~~ 325,048	~~7,729~~ 6,314	~~884,793~~ 393,385
Stormwater	~~53,014~~ 3,286	~~153,954~~ 4,270	~~1,677~~ 314	~~208,646~~ 7,870
Transport	~~434,038~~ 440,450	~~309,306~~ 366,761	~~400,268~~ 127,456	~~1,143,612~~ 934,667
Other Activity Groups	~~1,517,703~~ 1,378,717	~~636,954~~ 572,138	~~158,199~~ 142,843	~~2,312,856~~ 2,093,699
Total Capital Expenditure	~~**2,567,387**~~**1,910,159**	~~**1,760,077**~~ **1,272,247**	~~**569,551**~~ **277,243**	~~**4,897,014**~~ **3,459,649**

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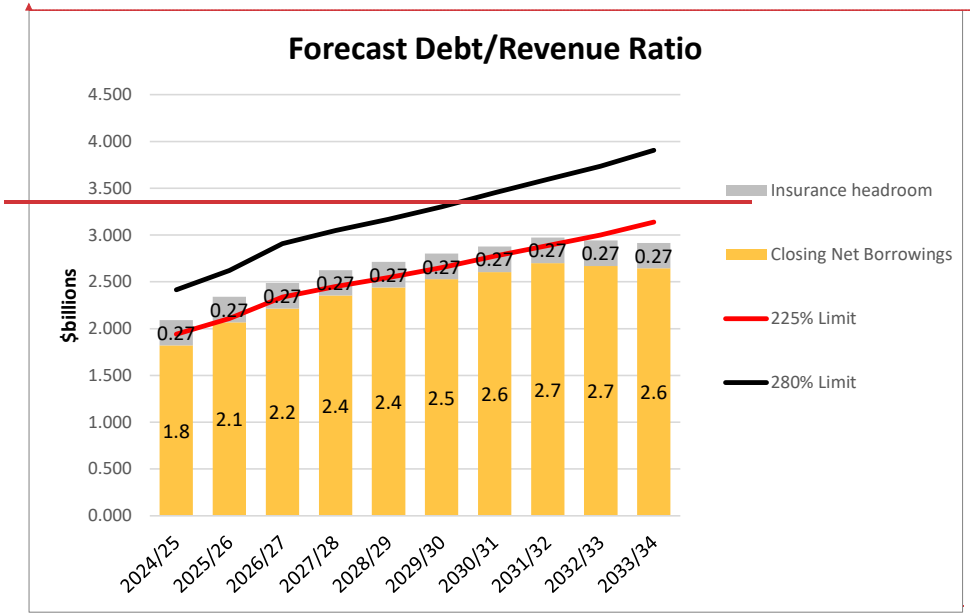
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Debt

The Council's net debt is expected to ~~increase~~decrease ~~increase~~ to $1.7~~2.9~~b ~~(including insurance headroom of $272m)~~ by 2033/34. This is a result of the reduction in the capital programme to increase borrowing capacity, and the transfer of water assets to a new water services entity.



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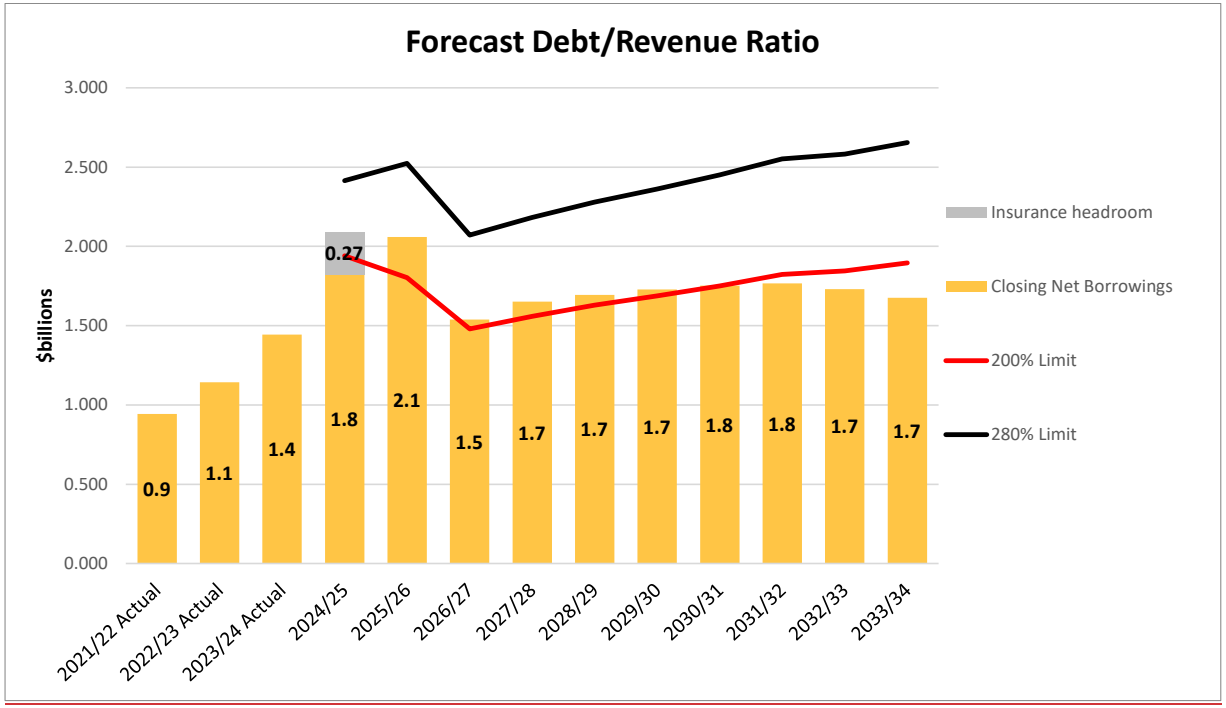
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For the debt to revenue ratio, income is defined as total revenue less development contributions, financial contributions, vested assets, gains on derivative financial instruments, sludge minimisation revenue and gain on sale of investments. Borrowings is comprised of total borrowings less cash and cash equivalents and Other Financial Assets.

The forecast shows that the Council will exceed its self-imposed debt to revenue limit, for the first ~~eight~~ six years of the plan, however it gradually returns within its limit in year seven~~nine~~. ~~If we exclude the insurance headroom and look at the debt proposed to be drawn down, then the debt to revenue limit is not exceeded.~~ Following reductions to the capital programme over the ten years, the Council has increased its borrowing capacity between the self-imposed debt to revenue ratio limit of 200% compared to the LGFA limit of 280%.

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The Board of LGFA may be able to approve bespoke lending covenants to a Council where this might be required to recover from a significant natural disaster that impacted the ability to remain within those set out in the LGFA's Foundation Policy. This would only be for a short term and would come via negotiation with the LGFA Board and would require bespoke reporting and monitoring arrangements to be put in place to ensure a path back to compliance with the Foundation Policy. Given this is bespoke and not guaranteed we have not forecast this in our strategy.

The debt to revenue ratio reduces from year six~~8~~ mainly due to surplus depreciation funding that is not spent on renewals. It is important to note that surplus depreciation is expected at this point in time due to the increased investment in new assets that are being depreciated incrementally over their useful life. Renewal of assets have been phased over the ten years due to affordability restraints which means postponements to some maintenance and renewal work. Funding for renewals from Year 11 onwards is planned to increase due to the rephasing and postponement in Years 1 to 10.

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The Council will need to continue to monitor its capital programme to ensure it remains within the debt to revenue limit, this will act as a key metric in making future capital expenditure decisions. The Council will also need to ensure that borrowing capacity is maintained within its debt to revenue ratio to respond to any natural events (e.g. earthquake).

Risks to levels of service

Transport

We have a higher cost of transport road maintenance in Wellington City relative to other councils with similar transport networks. The sub-structure of Wellington's roads consists of flexible, highly water susceptible clays. This creates issues with the maintenance of the network. The construction of a roading network within the topographical constraints of the area has resulted in the need for a substantial number of structures across the district. This steep topography also requires an extensive network of drainage assets as we need to control the stormwater runoff. These combined challenges create a cost of maintenance environment which is high and there is no easy solution.

High axle loads from Electric busses is also leading to accelerated pavement deterioration on bus routes.

We also have an aging asset base which becomes more expensive to maintain while delivering the service levels our customers expect.

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In this LTP we are planning to fund renewals at approximately 7~~5~~% of what is forecast in the asset management plans for transport. In doing so, we will seek value for money options through good procurement practices and review programme options for more cost-effective options. Deferring 25% of renewals does carry some risk that levels of service received by the community is lower than planned. This risk is mitigated by having very high confidence in the condition of the roading network, with recent and ongoing assessments of data taking place for the entire portfolio. We will prioritise renewals where the greatest need is, such as, safety, resilience, connectivity, and mode shift.

Three waters

The Council is proposing to transfer its three water assets to a regional Council Controlled Organisation as at 1 July 2026. In preparing the 2024-34 LTP the Council ~~While this LTP prioritises investment~~prioritised investment in water supply to address the number of water leaks and the risk of a water shortage, but there are a few wastewater and stormwater projects that are not proposed to proceed in the next ten years. For example,t~~T~~he Moa Point and Western Wastewater Treatment Plants require significant renewals as many of these assets are at the end of their useful life. While investment was planned to~~ill~~ occur, it was~~is~~ not at the level recommended in advice from Wellington Water, who manage the asset. Funding was~~is~~

included in the budget to progress concept design of core activity to allow further prioritisation and couldan be quickly implemented if failure occurs. Taking this approach increaseds the risk that there may be periods of non-compliance with consents, odour issues and impacts to water quality. With the Council's proposal to transfer its three water assets, the investment profile will be up to the regional water services CCO. Our analysis shows that the regional model is the most efficient way of achieving the appropriate investment in three waters assets.

Unplanned Events

Unplanned events require earlier than planned investment (e.g., Civil Defence emergencies, natural events, river slips, fire, theft, and safety concerns). These events, if they occur, could result in significant unplanned operating and capital costs. The Council has mitigations that can be executed in the case of such an event. The Council's debt to revenue limit is lower than covenants that would be set through lenders. Further, the Council has reduced its capital programme over the ten years of the LTP to increase its borrowing capacity, if requiredcurrently maintains insurance headroom of $272m within its forecasted debt, to respond to emergencies such as those caused by natural hazards and extreme weather events.

As part of this LTP the Council is looking to establish a perpetual investment disaster resilience fund. This fund could provide accessible funding in the event of a natural disaster or unplanned event, if required. Refer to improving balance sheet resilience section below.

Addressing the immediate affordability challenge

Paying for the city's everyday cost

Everyday costs should be paid for from everyday revenues. If we fail to achieve this, the everyday costs are funded by increasing debt. This means existing ratepayers are not paying for some of the services and amenities being provided to them. Using debt to fund everyday costs also means future ratepayers will pay for this cost, including interest. This is neither prudent nor sustainable.

The costs to undertake Council services are higher than previously anticipated. Next year alone, we're forecasting cost increases for depreciation (the cost of looking after our existing assets); $26m, interest $11m and inflationary pressures). Operating costs are forecast to be $972m1.4b by 2033/34, an increase of 1975% from the 2023/24 Annual Plan. Note that operating costs have been updated to exclude water related costs from 1 July 2026.

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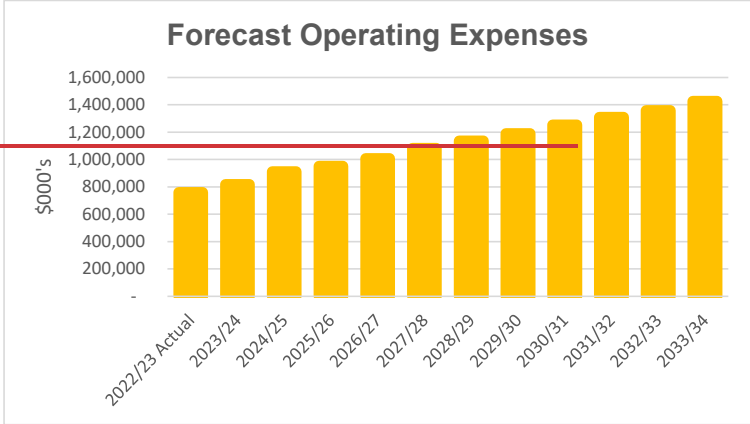
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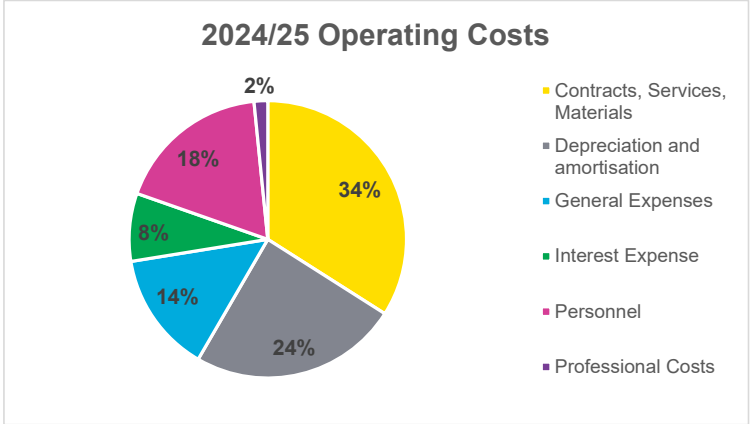
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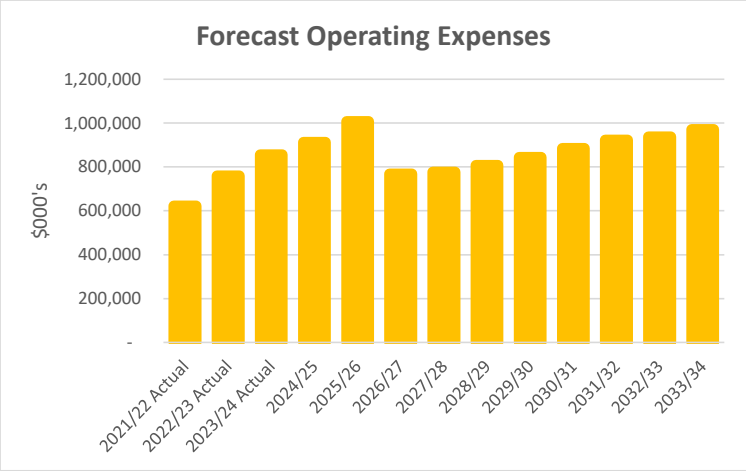
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Note this graph does not include the Loss on derecognition of assets in 2026/27 due to the transfer of three water assets to the new water services entity.

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To mitigate the increase in everyday costs the individual budgets included in the draft LTP have been scrutinised and refined. This has been a rigorous process over the last year. The focus has been on ensuring we're delivering core services. For example, we have cut back spending on removal of graffiti and events, including the annual fireworks display.

Depreciation

In the 2022/23 Annual Plan, due to a significant revaluation increase of the Council's water infrastructure assets, it was decided that the depreciation on the Council's water assets would be funded by rates based on the quantum of the three waters renewals capital programme for 2022/23 and 2023/24, and the Council was planning to ~~would~~ return to fully rates funding the depreciation by 2028/29. However, this decision will be considered in the future by a new water services entity. Based on this, it was resolved that the Council considered that it was financially prudent based on Section 100 of the Local Government Act 2002.

The Council has made further decisions to not rates fund the depreciation on some assets that are unlikely to be renewed at the end of their useful life. This means that the Council is not collecting sufficient revenue to cover its operating costs resulting in an unbalanced budget, which the Council has agreed is financially prudent.

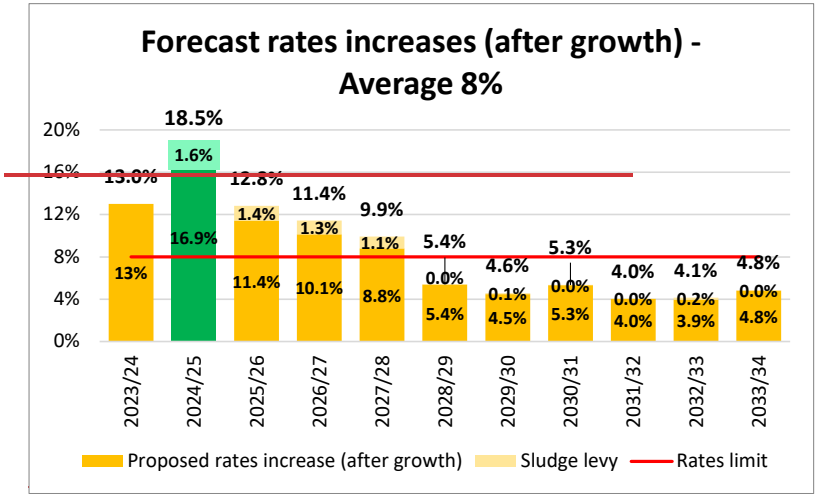
While we are not fully rates funding depreciation, we are still collecting sufficient revenue from rates to fund renewals planned during the ten years of this plan.

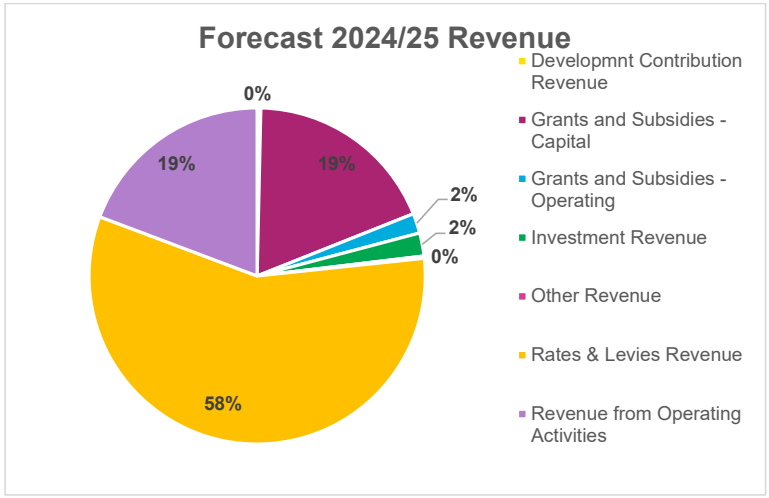
Rates

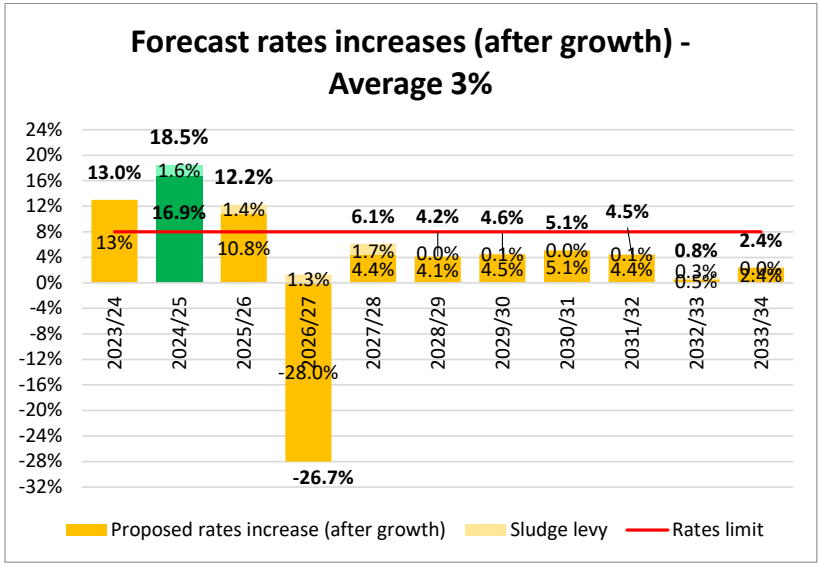
Rates are the principal source of funding for the Council's activities. However, where the user of a service can be readily identified and charged, we generally set fees and charges that cover the costs of providing that service. The Council places a high reliance on revenue from rates. In 2024/25, the forecasted revenue from rates is expected to be 58% of total revenue. Exploring new revenue streams and central government funding will continue to be a priority throughout the period of the 2024-34 Long-term Plan.

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Forecast rates increases (after growth) - Average 8%
20%
16%
12%
8%
4%
0%
18.5%
1.6%
16.9%
13.0%
13%
12.8%
1.4%
11.4%
11.4%
1.3%
10.1%
9.9%
1.1%
8.8%
5.4%
0.0%
5.4%
4.6%
0.1%
4.5%
5.3%
0.0%
5.3%
4.0%
0.0%
4.0%
4.1%
0.2%
3.9%
4.8%
0.0%
4.8%
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Proposed rates increase (after growth)
Sludge levy
Rates limit


Forecast 2024/25 Revenue
0%
19%
19%
2%
2%
0%
58%
Developmnt Contribution Revenue
Grants and Subsidies - Capital
Grants and Subsidies - Operating
Investment Revenue
Other Revenue
Rates & Levies Revenue
Revenue from Operating Activities



The Council's rating system has been considered with the intention that it represents the most appropriate rates options to address the present and future needs of the city. The Council has set a rates increase limit of between 5-8% (excluding the sludge levy) on average over the ten years of the Long-term Plan, however higher rates increases in the early years of the Long-term Plan are necessary to continue to fund the current levels of service. The average rates increase for the 2024-34 Long-term Plan is 38%. The Council will need to make prudent financial decisions to ensure it remains within this limit.

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Note that these figures have been updated to exclude water related expenditure and revenue from 1 July 2026.

The basis for the rates increase limit is to balance affordability with increased investment required in our infrastructure. On average Wellington residents pay a lower share of their household income on rates compared to surrounding areas. Many residents benefit from relatively high incomes comparative to the New Zealand average. We also have a significant commercial sector that allows residents to afford higher levels of services than other smaller centres. The 2007 Shand report reviewing Local Government rating suggested a benchmark of rates around 5% of household income being affordable. There are however suburbs that are nearly paying 5% of their household income.

In July 2024, the Council will be introducing a new sludge levy to fund the cost of the new Moa Point sludge minimisation facility. This was approved under the Infrastructure Funding and Finance Act 2020 (IFFA), we consulted on this option through 2021/2022 and received support from the New Zealand Government (Cabinet and the Minister of Housing) in August 2023. We are collecting the levy on behalf of the special purpose vehicle owned by Crown Infrastructure Partners. The cost of the sludge levy for ratepayers needs to be considered when assessing affordability for our ratepayers.

Improving Balance Sheet resilience

There are two main challenges to the long-term resilience of the Council's balance sheet – firstly, the Council's investment assets are not appropriately diversified, and secondly, the capacity available to insure Council's assets is becoming increasingly constrained.

Lack of diversification in the investment portfolio

The Council's investment assets are highly concentrated in terms of geography, asset type and liquidity. The investment portfolio has two main asset classes – WIAL shares and property ground leases – which make up 8993% of the Council's investment assets. Both these classes of assets are highly exposed to the same risks and disruptive events, including natural disasters and market events, due to the fact that they are all property assets based in Wellington. Because they are exposed to the same risks, the Council may have limited ability to liquidate these assets if it needs funds to contribute to a recovery effort following a natural disaster or significant market disruption. With changes to national hazard modelling (discussed below), the likelihood that the Council would need to release capital following a natural disaster has increased significantly.



Cost and availability of insurance

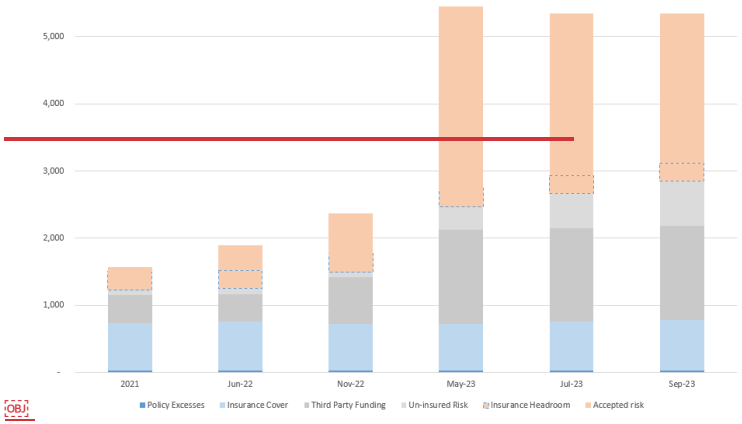
Insurance premiums are increasing, and, in some cases, insurers are reducing the levels of cover available to manage their overall exposure to Wellington. The effects are being felt by both private and public property and asset owners. Compounding this, is the continued increases in building and infrastructure valuations which drive increases in the cost to replace assets leading to increased insurance premiums. These trends are forecast to continue in the future.

The release of the 2022 National Seismic Hazard Model has further increased the Probable Maximum Loss from a major event for many of the Council's assets. This means the financial impact of a seismic event is greater than previously thought. Additionally, recent weather events across New Zealand have highlighted the reality of climate issues and their impact, alongside more well understood seismic risks.

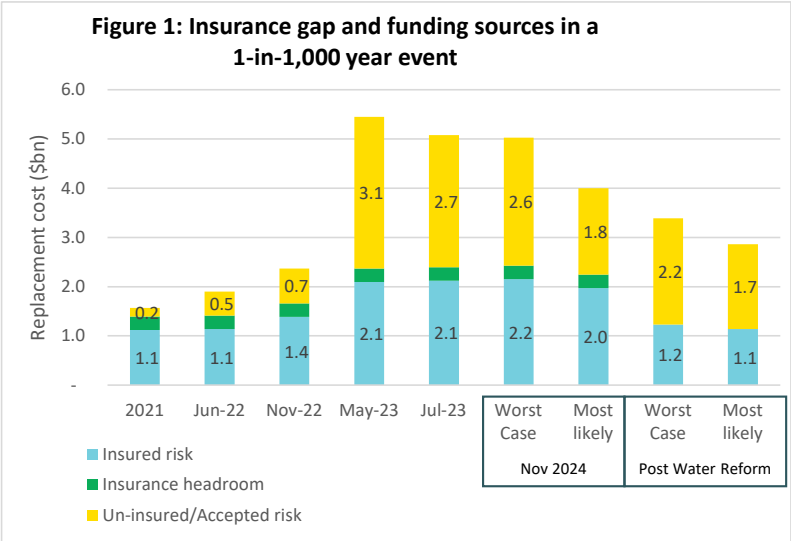
The combined effect of changes in loss modelling, and the impact of cost and availability of insurance is that the Council now has a significantly higher proportion of uninsured risk (between $1.8m to $2.6m, or post water reform between $1.7m to $2.2m) than it did when it set the 2021-31 LTP. The $272m debt headroom the Council previously held~~olds~~ to cover uninsured risk is now far from sufficient to cover expected losses after a major event.

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The three waters assets make up the majority of the total replacement cost of the Councils portfolio, however, the expected loss on these assets after an event is expected to be much less than other types of assets (such as buildings). This means that the reduction in the insurance gap is small, even though the reduction in insured value is large.



Reshaping the investment portfolio to achieve greater resilience

As a result of work undertaken over the last couple of years, including the work the Council has been doing on an insurance road map, the Council ~~is c planning to divest its holding in Wellington International Airport Limited to invest the proceeds into a new Perpetual Investment Fund~~has significantly reduced its capital programme to create borrowing capacity to be able to respond to a major event. ~~A Perpetual Investment Fund is an investment fund that is intended to continue forever.~~

Along with the ~~WIAL shares~~reduced capital programme, the Council intends to use the proceeds from periodic sales of selected ground leases to ~~further capitalise the new fund~~capitalise a disaster resilience fund. The proceeds in the fund would be used for the long-term benefit of the city by providing critical, accessible funding in the event of a natural disaster while continuing to supplement rates revenue through a conservative annual dividend stream.

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Other councils have taken similar action to manage their portfolios and enable long-term investment in their communities. Particular examples are the New Plymouth District Council Perpetual Investment Fund, the Dunedin City Council Waipori Fund and the Hawke's Bay Regional Council Future Investment Fund.

The benefits of recycling the Council's investment assets in this way are:

- Reduced geographic concentration meaning not all assets are subject to the same disaster risks and returns are decoupled from the performance of Wellington CBD.
- Increased diversification of the portfolio via the introduction of a new financial asset class and a reduction in exposure to the property sector.
- Increased liquidity of the portfolio to ensure funding is available for the Council in the event of a significant natural disaster and that the capital can be available at relatively short notice and with low exit costs (albeit only as a last resort).
- The investment portfolio can be matched to the unique risk tolerance of the Council
- Enable the Council to pursue other objectives. For example, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors can be taken into account when making investment decisions.
- Maintaining financial returns for the Council, albeit through new revenue sources including dividend and interest income.
- Improve intergenerational wellbeing through the building up of investment wealth and reduced reliance on future rates increases
- ~~Reduces the Council's reliance on debt headroom as a way to manage insurance risk, which frees up debt capacity for other Council priorities (e.g., capital or infrastructure investments)~~

The Council will also continue work on the insurance road map and through this work, consider strategic ways to deploy capital to get the best out of available options. These could include exploring new alternative insurance solutions (e.g., parametric insurance, captive insurance), or further changes to the shape of the Council's asset base.

Advocating for change in funding and financing for local government

The current economic environment has created significant challenges in setting the LTP budgets and balancing the need to invest in the City's infrastructure while still delivering the services Wellingtonians have come to expect. The infrastructure demands and needs will continue to grow. While, in the future, the economic conditions may improve the funding and financing system for local authorities is not sustainable.

The Council has taken up new financing mechanisms as they have become available, such as setting a levy in accordance with the Infrastructure Funding and Financing Act 2020 to fund the Moa Point sludge minimisation facility. The Council also supports future change, including the establishment of a new style of regional council-controlled organisation that has the mandate and financial sustainability to ensure the provision of a safe, reliable, quality water service for our communities.

We will continue to work collaboratively with other councils and central government to seek changes to provide a sustainable funding model for local government and support new ways to deliver core services in the medium to long-term.

Appendices – Other mandatory financial strategy disclosures

Financial Investments and Equity Securities

We hold investments in companies and trusts, property, and cash. The full policy on the Council's investment management can be found in the Investment policy [insert link on our website].

Investments in companies and trusts

The Council has investments in five companies and interests in three Trusts. The primary reason for holding equity in these entities are principally to achieve efficiency and community outcomes and not for financial return on investment.

Company	Shareholding	Principal Reason for Holding	Targeted return
Wellington Cable Car Company Ltd	100%	Maintains and operates Wellington's iconic Cable Car	Nil
Wellington Regional Economic Development Agency Ltd (WellingtonNZ)	80%	The city and region's economic development organisation	Nil
Wellington Waterfront Ltd	100%	Acts as bare trustee for the Waterfront project	Nil
Wellington International Airport Ltd	34%	Optimise the return on the overall investment portfolio and to diversify the Council's income sources	Between $10m and $30m per annum
Chaffers Marina Holdings Ltd	9.93%		Nil
Civic Financial Services Ltd	4.78%	Insurance and risk management	Nil
New Zealand Local Government Funding Agency Ltd	8%	Borrowing	$100k per annum
Trust	**Shareholding**	**Principal Reason for Holding**	**Targeted return**
Karori Sanctuary Trust (Zealandia)	100%	Manages ongoing conservation and restoration work at its sanctuary in Karori	Nil
Wellington Museums Trust (Experience Wellington)	100%	Manages educational and cultural facilities and experiences	Nil
Wellington Zoo Trust	100%	Manages the Wellington Zoo, provides experiences and education and supports conservation initiatives	Nil

Investments in property

The Council's ground leases, and land and buildings are held primarily for investment purposes. The Council periodically reviews its continued ownership of investment properties by assessing the benefits of continued ownership in reference to strategic benefit, financial return, risk, and opportunity cost.

Cash

The Council operates on a "net debt" basis and does not separately maintain significant long-term cash investments. The general policy with respect to surplus short-term cash is to invest any short-term surplus cash or to temporarily reduce borrowings.

Cash is held for liquidity purposes like the prefunding of debt maturing within 18 months, or short-term cash surplus investments. The Council has an external lending covenant relating to liquidity whereby we must hold 115% of liquid assets over debt, this is supported by cash held in current accounts and term deposits.

Policy on Giving Security for Borrowing

To borrow cash, we must offer our lenders security, just like residents do with their mortgage.

Like most councils, debt is secured against rates income. Lenders like this as security and it helps keep our interest rates low. Giving rates as security means that our lenders can make us charge ratepayers more to repay debt. That is why it is important to keep our debt at a sustainable level.
We may also offer other security, including physical assets, in certain circumstances. The full policy on giving securities can be found in the Liability Management Policy [insert link to our website].

Local Government (Financial Reporting and Prudence) Regulations 2014 Disclosures

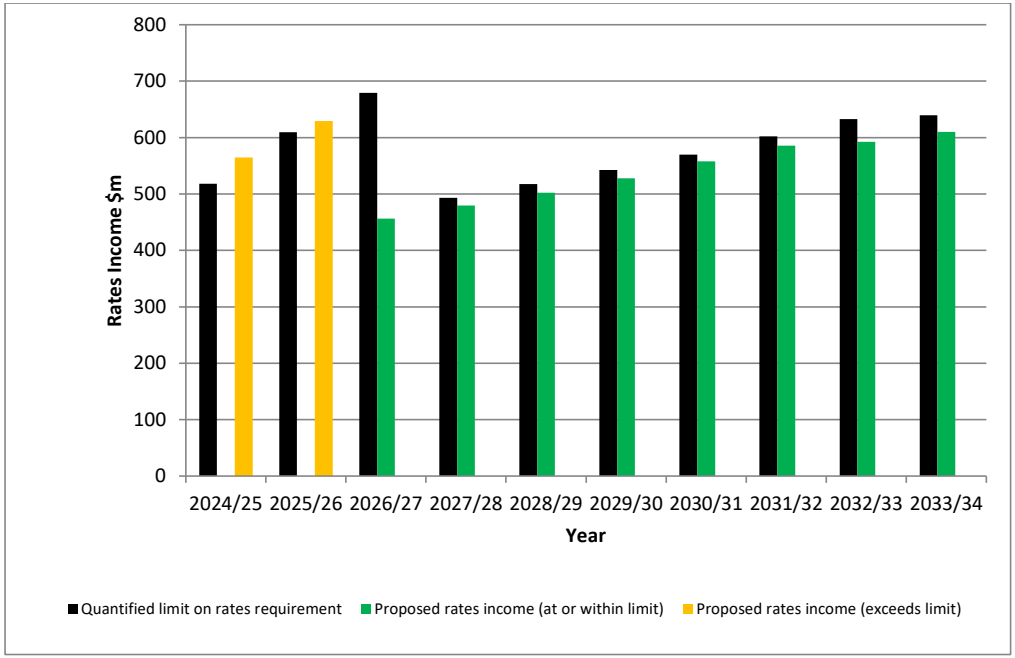
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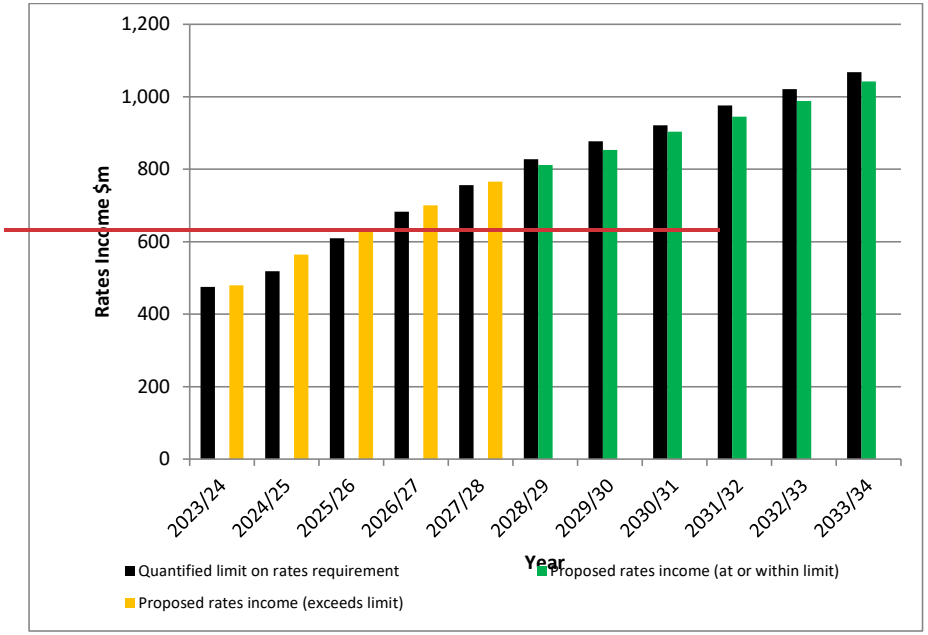
We have included the Disclosure Statement in this Long-Term Plan in accordance with the Local Government (Financial Reporting and Prudence) Regulations 2014. The purpose of this statement is to disclose our planned financial performance in relation to various nationally consistent benchmarks. These benchmarks enable the assessment of whether we are prudently managing our revenues, expenses, assets, liabilities, and general financial dealings.

These measures allow for comparison of financial performance with other councils. However, readers are urged to read the commentary and explanations provided to give context to the information, as it is not always possible to compare Wellington City Council's results with other councils due to their size, location and provision of services.

Rates affordability benchmark

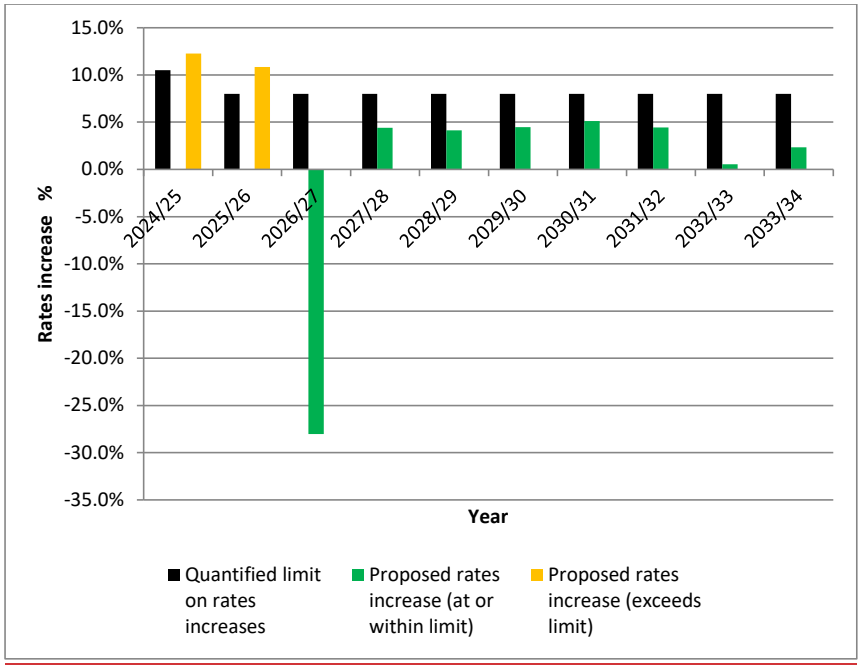
The following graph compares the council's planned rates increases with a quantified limit on rates included in the financial strategy. The quantified limit is an average rates increase of between 5-8% over the ten years of the LTP.

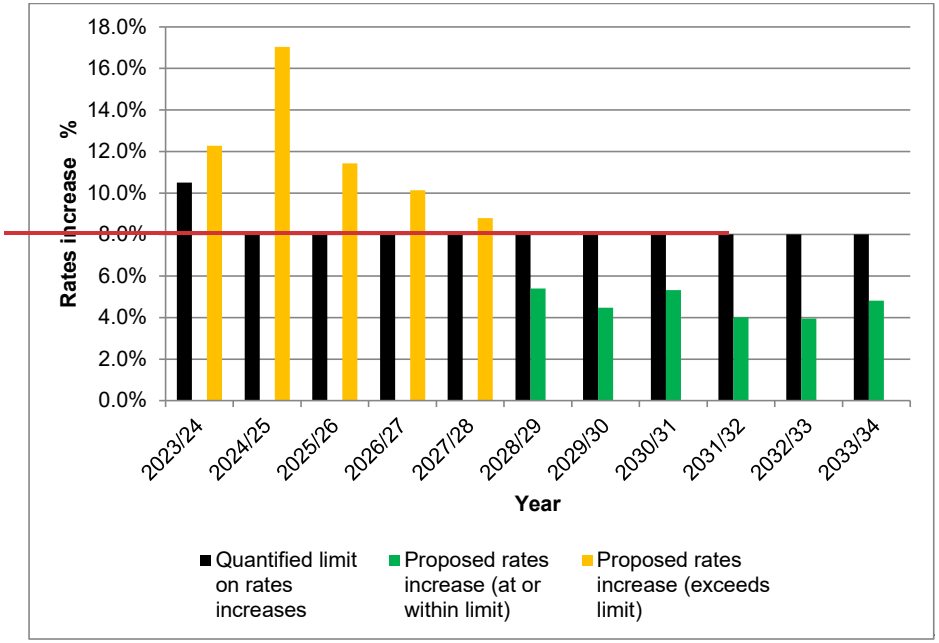



1,200
1,000
800
600
400
200
0
Rates Income $m
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Year
Quantified limit on rates requirement
Proposed rates income (at or within limit)
Proposed rates income (exceeds limit)

Rates (increases) affordability

The following graph compares the council's planned rates increases with a quantified limit on rates increases contained in the financial strategy included in this long-term plan. The quantified limit is an average rates increase of between 5-8% over the ten years of the LTP.

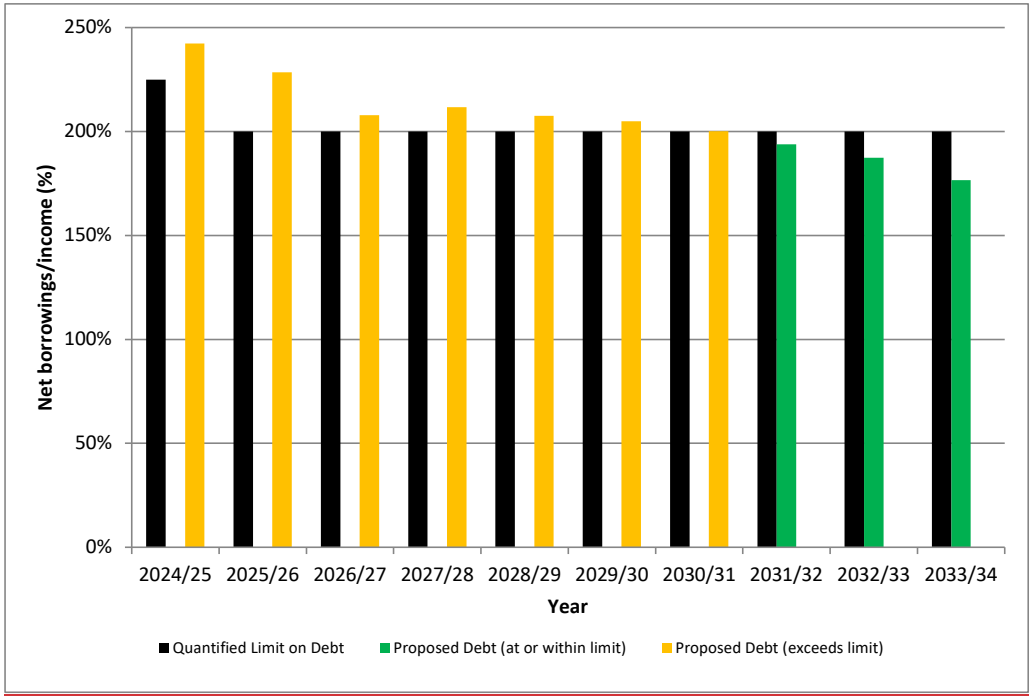


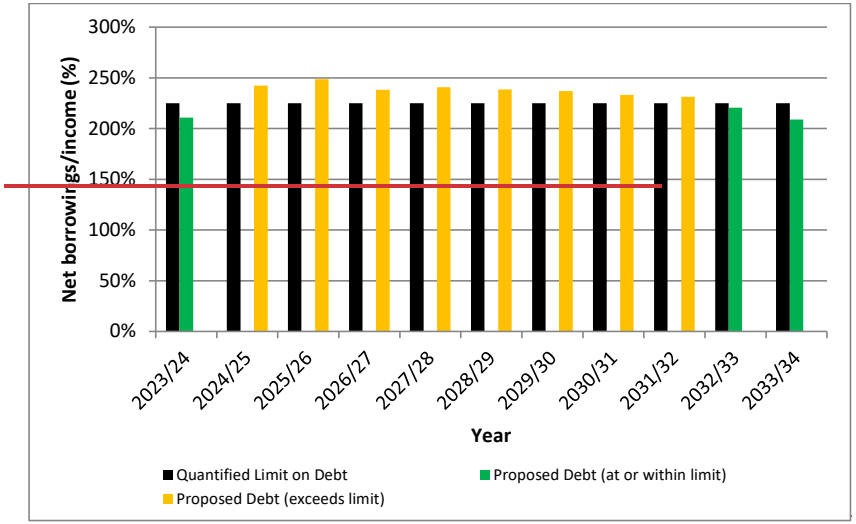

18.0%
16.0%
14.0%
12.0%
10.0%
8.0%
6.0%
4.0%
2.0%
0.0%
Rates increase %
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Year
Quantified limit on rates increases
Proposed rates increase (at or within limit)
Proposed rates increase (exceeds limit)

Debt affordability benchmark

The following graph compares the council's proposed borrowing with a quantified limit on borrowing stated in the financial strategy included in the council's long-term plan. The quantified limit is net borrowings, comprised of borrowings less cash and cash equivalents, being less than or equal to 225% of income. For this measure income is defined as total revenue less vested assets and development contribution income.

The council meets the debt affordability benchmark if its planned borrowing is within each quantified limit on borrowings.



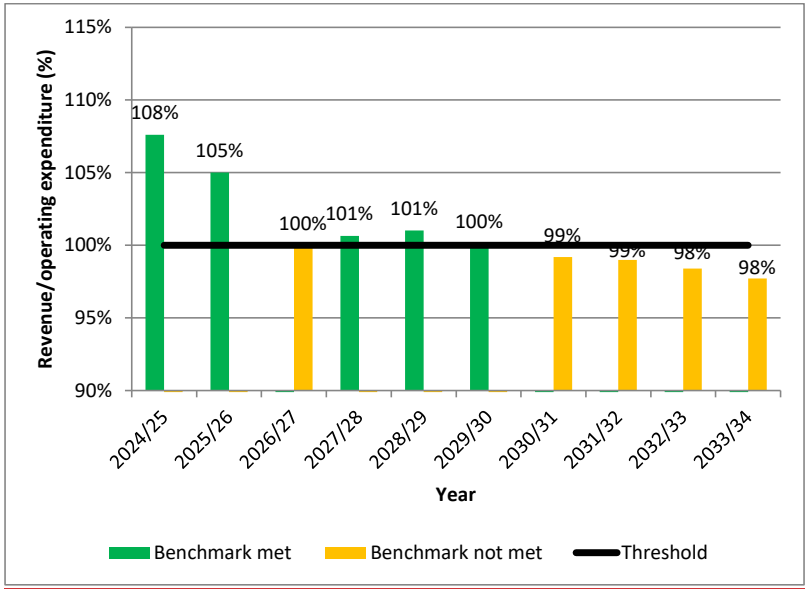

300%
250%
200%
150%
100%
50%
0%
Net borrowings/income (%)
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Year
Quantified Limit on Debt
Proposed Debt (at or within limit)
Proposed Debt (exceeds limit)

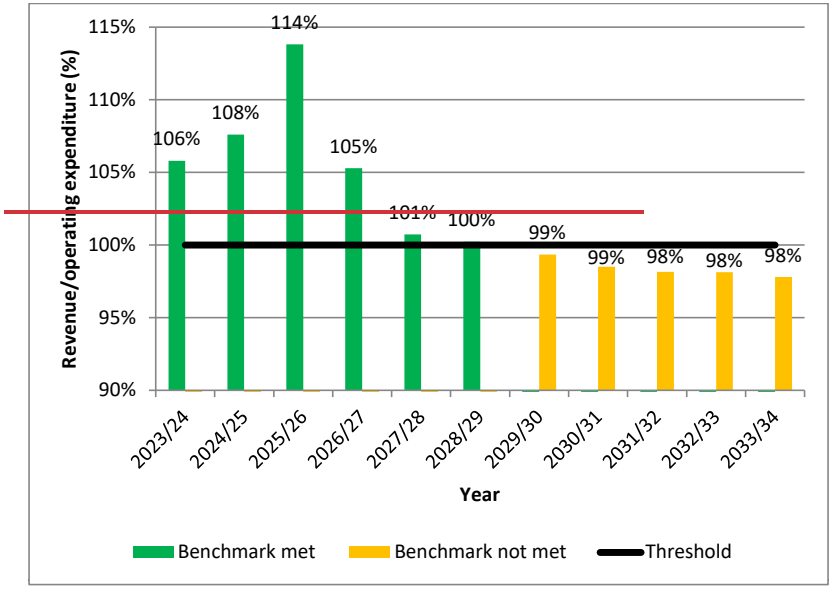
Balanced budget benchmark

The following graph displays the council's revenue (excluding development contributions, financial contributions, vested assets, gains on derivative financial instruments, revaluations of property, plant, or equipment, and gains on sale of investment in associates) as a proportion of operating expenses (excluding losses on derivative financial instruments and revaluations of property, plant, or equipment).

The council meets this benchmark if its planned revenue equals or is greater than its planned operating expenses.

Where council does not meet this benchmark, this is due to some of the planned operating expenditure being initially debt funded and in some cases is then rates funded to repay the debt for the purposes of inter-generational equity. The first three years includes capital revenue for the sludge minimisation facility.



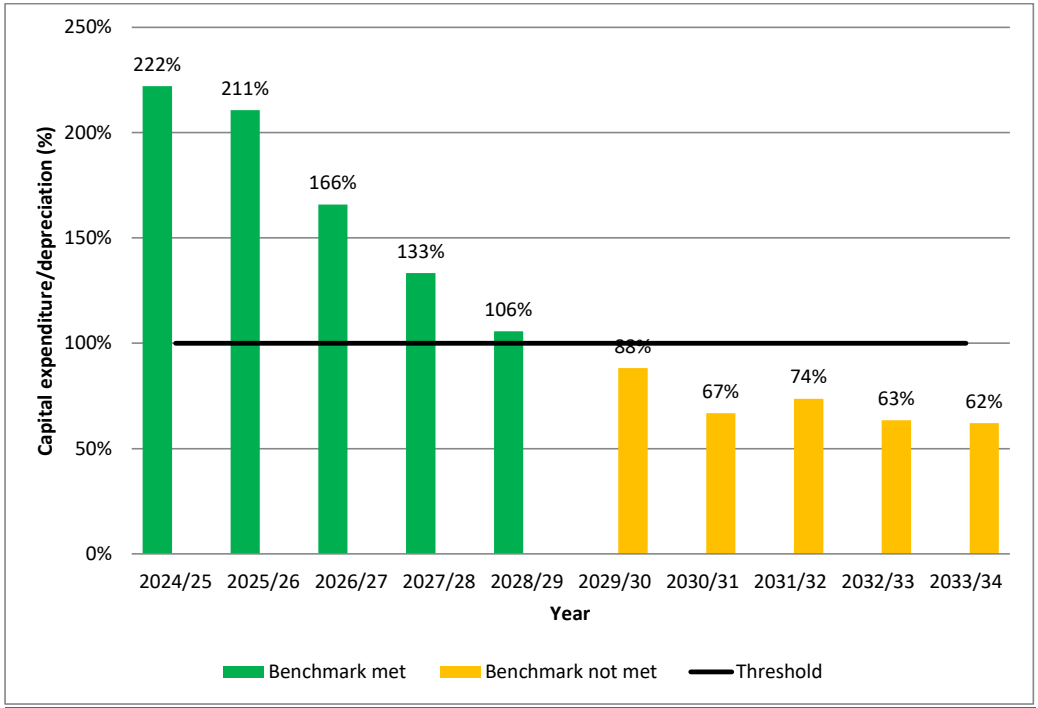

115%
110%
105%
100%
95%
90%
Revenue/operating expenditure (%)
114%
108%
106%
105%
101%
100%
99%
99%
98%
98%
98%
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Year
Benchmark met
Benchmark not met
Threshold

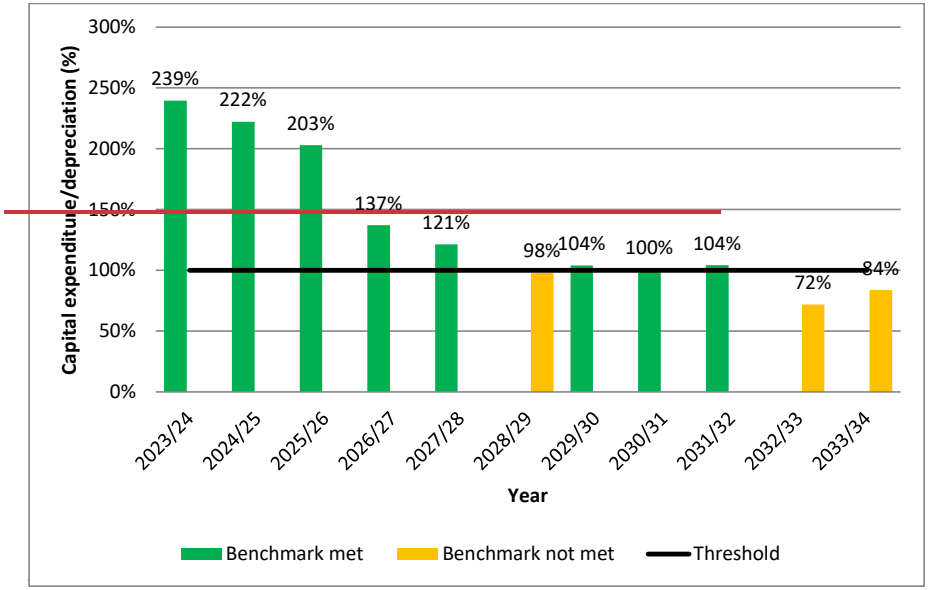
Essential services benchmark

The following graph displays the council's planned capital expenditure on network services as a proportion of expected depreciation on network services. Essential services comprise expenditure on the three waters and transport.

The council meets the essential services benchmark if its planned capital expenditure on network services equals or is greater than expected depreciation on network services.

In years 5 to 10 of the plan, the level of capital expenditure on network services falls below depreciation. This is driven by capital expenditure to improve levels of service occurring in the later years; the depreciation impact from this capital expenditure lags behind the investment. The depreciation is only for the existing assets in commission and is not related to the capital expenditure of assets yet to be commissioned.

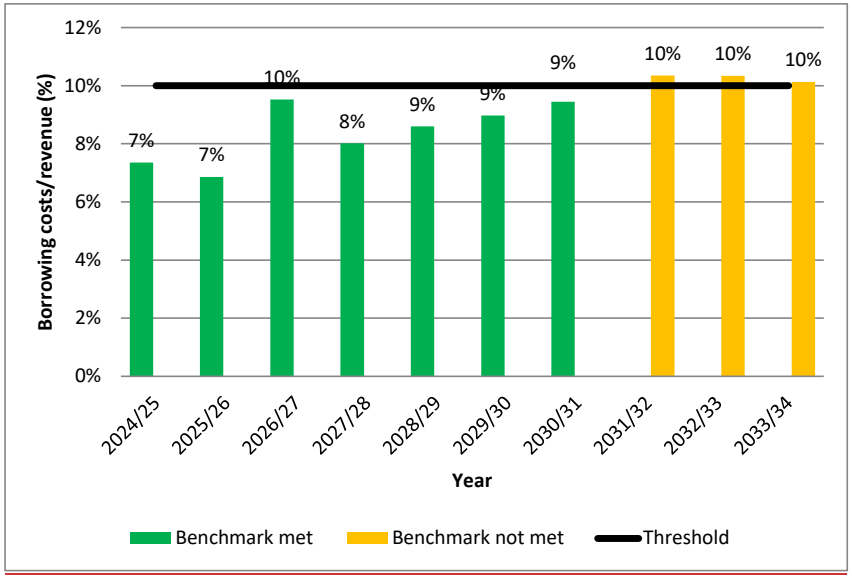


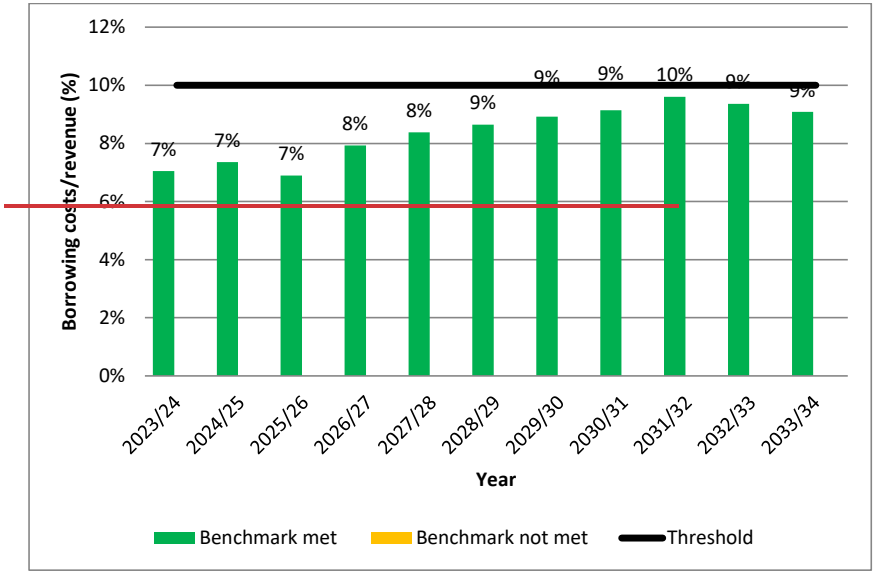

300%
250%
200%
150%
100%
50%
0%
Capital expenditure/depreciation (%)
239%
222%
203%
137%
121%
98%
104%
100%
104%
72%
84%
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Year
Benchmark met
Benchmark not met
Threshold

Debt servicing benchmark

The following graph displays the council's planned borrowing costs as a proportion of planned revenue (excluding development contributions, financial contributions, vested assets, gains on derivative financial instruments, and revaluations of property, plant, or equipment).

Because Statistics New Zealand projects the council's population will grow more slowly than the national population growth rate, it meets the debt servicing benchmark if its borrowing costs equal or are less than 10% of its revenue.




12%
10%
8%
6%
4%
2%
0%
Borrowing costs/revenue (%)
7%
7%
7%
8%
8%
9%
9%
9%
10%
9%
9%
2023/24
2024/25
2025/26
2026/27
2027/28
2028/29
2029/30
2030/31
2031/32
2032/33
2033/34
Year
Benchmark met
Benchmark not met
Threshold