

# **Quarterly Report**

**October - December 2023** 

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### General Managers Message



### Greg **McDonald**

As we close another quarter, I am proud to reflect on the resilience, community spirit, and progress that defines the Upper Hunter Shire. This period, marked by both challenges and celebrations, has once again showcased our collective strength and commitment to fostering a thriving community.

In late October, the Barton Street Fire over Scone Mountain presented a significant threat to our community. This fire, spreading across approximately 1000 hectares, brought together Council, the Rural Fire Service, Police, State Emergency Services, NSW Health, Local Land Services, and other government departments in a unified response. The establishment of an Emergency Operations Centre at the Scone Administration Building was pivotal in coordinating our efforts. Thankfully, due to favourable weather conditions and the exemplary work of all involved, we were able to mitigate the threat without significant damage to property or infrastructure. This event underscored the critical role Council plays in emergency management, supporting other agencies and ensuring our community's safety.

Amidst these challenges, we also celebrated events that brought joy, excitement, and a sense of togetherness to our community. The Wings, Wheels, and Warbirds event at Scone Memorial Airport was a spectacular gathering, drawing visitors to our town with an array of classic cars, vintage trucks, motorbikes, and the aweinspiring Warbirds. This familyfriendly event not only offered a memorable experience but also supported charitable causes.

Further enhancing our community's vibrancy was the Twilight Christmas Carnival Series, which travelled through Merriwa, Murrurundi, and Scone. These events, featuring markets, street performers, music, and a synthetic ice skating rink in Merriwa, provided delightful experiences for locals and their families, fostering connectedness and seasonal cheer.

A significant highlight of the quarter was the remarkable progress made on the MR358 Merriwa to Willow Tree Road project. This period saw not only the securing of necessary funding but also the completion of formal agreements and the awarding of the construction contract to Daracon Group. This series of achievements marks a pivotal moment for our community, symbolising our collective commitment to enhancing regional infrastructure and connectivity.

The Scone CBD Revitalisation project itself has continued to make progress, remaining on track and schedule. This quarter saw further enhancements to our town's infrastructure, aesthetics, and accessibility, all contributing to the long-term vision for a revitalised and thriving central business district.

As we reflect on this quarter, it is clear that our strength lies in our ability to come together, whether in times of challenge or celebration. The dedication of our emergency services, the enthusiasm for our community events, and the support for local businesses are all testaments to the vibrant and resilient spirit of the Upper Hunter Shire.

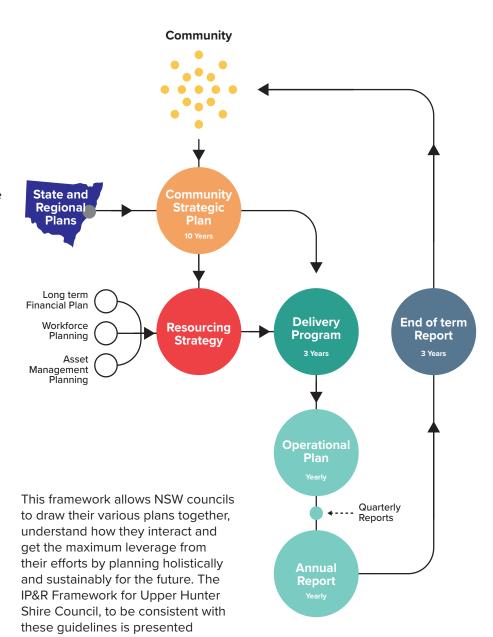


in the diagram.

### **Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework**

Local Governments in NSW are required to undertake their planning and reporting activities in accordance with the Local Government Act 1993 and the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005. In 2009, the Local Government Act was amended to create an Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) requirement. A greater emphasis is placed on longer term planning with key elements including a Community Strategic Plan setting out the strategic directions (minimum of 10 years), Delivery Program outlining how Council will deliver on these directions (4-year period) and an annual Operational Plan. As at June 30, 2012, NSW councils are required to be working within the IP&R Framework.

The Office of Local Government provides guidelines and information to assist councils in meeting their requirements. The IP&R framework recognises that most communities share similar aspirations: a safe, healthy and pleasant place to live, a sustainable environment, opportunities for social interaction, opportunities for education and employment, and reliable infrastructure. The difference lies in how each Community responds to these needs. It also recognises that council plans and policies should not exist in isolation - that they are interconnected.



# **Quarterly Highlight**

Twilight Christmas
Carnival

Twilight Christmas Carnival Murrurundi





Twlight Christmas Carnival Scone

The Upper Hunter Twilight Christmas Carnival 2023 was a festive journey that wove its way through the towns of Merriwa, Murrurundi, and Scone, lighting up the region with the inaugural Advent Trail. This series of events, designed to spread joy and community spirit, brought together interactive Christmas installations and a wealth of activities that captivated residents and visitors alike.

Setting out to foster community spirit and support local businesses during the holiday season, the Twilight Christmas Carnival offered a unique blend of entertainment, shopping, and festive fun. In Merriwa, the event was highlighted by a synthetic ice skating rink at the Merriwa Sportsground, a unique experience for a regional community. The celebrations extended to Bettington Street, where unique shopping experiences, delicious food, and holiday activities brightened the lead-up to Christmas.

Scone's 'Christmas on Kelly' shone brightly as a testament to the community's spirit, successfully navigating the ongoing revitalisation construction works to transform the street into a festive wonderland. The event brought late-night shopping, an assortment of food trucks, holiday music, market stalls, carnival rides, and a visit from Santa Claus, infusing the street with vitality and offering a much-needed economic boost. The evening became a vibrant showcase of how community events can coexist with, and even enhance, urban development projects.

Murrurundi was not left behind, hosting its portion of the Twilight Christmas Carnival. The town embraced the holiday season with festive-themed activities, live music, roving entertainers, and local food and shopping experiences, all set against the backdrop of beautifully decorated community and business locations.

The Twilight Christmas Carnival 2023 saw a significant turnout, effectively boosting the local economy and providing a platform for businesses to showcase their offerings. The series of events across Merriwa, Murrurundi, and Scone not only supported the local economy but also strengthened the sense of community, showcasing the Upper Hunter's vibrancy and resilience.

Proudly funded by the NSW Government (insert specific funding stuff here) in association with Upper Hunter Shire Council and local community groups, the program's success underscores the importance of community events in fostering regional development and social cohesion. The Upper Hunter Twilight Christmas Carnival 2023 stands as a vibrant example of how such celebrations can enhance community spirit, support local businesses, and create unforgettable experiences for everyone involved.

# Community Priorities Report

Council has identified five community priorities to guide Council's agenda.



### A connected community

Developing and deepening connections of people to each other and their community.



### **Strategic Objective**

- 1.1 Advocate for and increase the availability and affordability of health services.
- 1.2 Work collaboratively to address social disadvantage.
- 1.3 Increase promotion of healthy lifestyle.

1.4 Enhance partnerships to maintain a safe community.

- We are continuing to review actions in the Disability Inclusion
   Action Plan to ensure they meet the needs of the community.
- Council is actively addressing social disadvantage through targeted initiatives, including offering free driver training for Merriwa youth and promoting awareness on the International Day of People with Disability. We're enhancing support for vulnerable populations by partnering with Upper Hunter Homeless Support and facilitating supported playgroups at Merriwa Library.
- Council promotes healthy lifestyles through various activities like the Gundy Gravel Ride, social tennis in Scone, and a triathlon "come and try" event. We've also facilitated NSW Wheelchair Sport workshops for school students and collaborated with Where there's a Will to offer mental health training. Our school holiday programs cover sports from tennis to cricket, and the development of the mountain bike trail at Scone Mountain National Park is progressing well, encouraging community engagement in physical activities.
- Council is enhancing community safety through diverse initiatives, including hosting drought drop-in sessions in Merriwa and bike skills clinics in Scone. Our commitment to collaboration is evident in the regular meetings of Community Advisory Committees across all districts, addressing concerns raised by residents. Additionally, we facilitate the Merriwa Family Support Network and the Upper Hunter Community Services Interagency, ensuring comprehensive support and safety measures for our community.



# A connected community

Developing and deepening connections of people to each other and their community.



### **Strategic Objective**

- .5 Advocate for, support and provide services and facilities for the community.
- 1.6 Provide and support a range of community events, festivals and celebrations.

1.7 Acknowledge and respect our Aboriginal culture, heritage and people.

- Council actively advocates for and provides essential services and facilities, including the continuation of the Merriwa playgroup and consulting on the proposed Murrurundi Youth Centre. We also offer a variety of affordable housing options catering to diverse community needs, from aged care to support for families exiting domestic violence situations.
- Council supports a vibrant community through diverse events and initiatives, including the Merriwa Family Fun Day and a Youth Services Colour Run. Preparations are in progress for the Kia Ora Youth Music Camp and Australia Day celebrations, alongside planning for the Mayor for a Day competition. The Upper Hunter Youth Council, supported by Council's Youth Workers, actively engages young people from local schools in planning and leading their own activities, fostering leadership and community engagement.
- Council continue to liaise with local Aboriginal groups on various community issues.



### **Protected Environment**

Ensuring the ongoing protection of our environment and natural resources.



### **Strategic Objective**

- 2.1 Advocate for, facilitate and support programs that protect and sustain our diverse environment for future generations.
- 2.2 Encourage and support community participation to care for our environment.
- 2.3 Ensure all actions, decisions and policy response to natural hazards and climate change remain current.
- 2.4 Implement and regularly review Strategic Land Use Plans, Environmental Planning Instruments and Development Controls, which reflect the needs and expectations of the broad Community.

- Council has helped guide the development of a community nursery at Merriwa. Planned activities include the production of seedlings for the rehabilitation and improvement of agricultural lands and also revegetation of areas impacted by recent bushfires. Increasing biodiversity through planting native vegetation provides a benefit for future generations.
- Council has supported and facilitated the planning process for the
  establishment of a community nursery at Merriwa. The planned
  activities for this nursery include the production of seedlings for
  the rehabilitation and improvement of agricultural lands and also
  revegetation of areas impacted by recent bushfires.
- Council is an ongoing participant in Hunter Joint Organisation programs to develop strategies aimed at building community resilience and disaster recovery capacity at a local level. This is in response to an increasing frequency of natural disasters such as floods and bushfires across the environment.
- Work has been progressing on a review of the Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy. The draft revised strategy will be presented to Council and placed on public exhibition in the coming months. An Upper Hunter Region Employment Lands Strategy is also being prepared in partnership with Muswellbrook, Singleton and Dungog Shire Councils. The Upper Hunter LEP 2013 and Upper Hunter DCP 2023 continue to be applied in the assessment of every development application. Work has commenced on a housekeeping amendment to the Upper Hunter LEP 2013.



### **Protected Environment**

Ensuring the ongoing protection of our environment and natural resources.



### **Strategic Objective**

- 2.5 Provide efficient and effective advisory, assessment and regulatory services focused on being customer 'friendly', responsive and environmentally responsible.
- 2.6 Plan, facilitate and provide for a changing population for current and future generations.

- 2.7 Provide efficient and effective waste and recycling services and support improved waste minimisation and recycling practices.
- 2.8 Implement policies to ensure the protection of strategic agricultural lands, equine critical industry clusters, natural resources and heritage.

- As reflected in the monthly KPI's for the July to September quarter, Council continues to provide efficient and effective advisory, development assessment and regulatory services. Development assessment and building certification timeframes, inspection programs and responses to customer complaints have been tracking reasonably well.
- Work has been progressing on a review of the Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy. The Strategy aims to provide clear direction for decisions taken by Council and NSW Government agencies relating to the future use of land within the Upper Hunter Local Government Area (LGA). The Strategy states land use planning objectives and strategies to guide growth and change, and identifies where growth and change are expected to occur. It also identifies infrastructure requirements to support development and will help inform local and state government budget processes. Council's Housing and Land Supply Monitor (which is maintained and updated annually) indicates that the current supply of lands for urban and rural residential development is generally considered to be sufficient to meet anticipated demands.
- Council used state government grant funding to purchase a
  plastic shredder allowing some plastics processing to occur at
  the Scone Waste Facility. Council continues to collect and extend
  the range of other waste items for recycling such as polystyrene
  (recycled through the Foam Muncher program), solar panels and
  Drummuster drums.
- Council continues to apply the provisions of the Upper Hunter LEP and DCP when assessing development applications to ensure the protection of strategic agricultural lands, equine critical industry clusters, natural resources and heritage. Council resolved to endorse the draft Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy and place the strategy on public exhibition. The Strategy contains a range of strategic directions to protect strategic agricultural lands, equine critical industry clusters, natural resources and heritage.



# **Thriving Economy**

Strengthening our vibrant industries and economy while seizing emerging opportunities.



### **Strategic Objective**

- Broaden and promote the range of business and industry sectors.
- Encourage retail and commercial business to increase local employment opportunities.
- Provide attractive and functional town centres and support revitalisation of the towns and villages including investment in built heritage and improvement of existing buildings.
- Provide diversity in tourist attractions and experiences.
- Promote the Upper Hunter's unique brand identity.
- Facilitate and support increased and innovative tourism and marketing opportunities.

- Council supports the local business industry through development of commercial spaces, leasing commercial premises to business owners and planning for land use.
- Council's focus on business growth has been on events that promote the area and generate tourism and attraction to the Shire.
- Council is investing in its town centres. Both Merriwa and Scone have seen capital upgrades in 2023/24 have seen capital upgrades in 2023/24.
- Council continued to improve visitation of Hunter Warbirds aviation facility. Council also supported both the Aberdeen Highland Games and King of the Ranges Festival.
- Council has received funding to prepare a brand identity. This project will be undertaken over the 2023/24 and 24/25 financial years to promote the area, drive economic development and foster community pride.
- Council will continue to support tourism through the four main events across the shire each year as well as contributing to events through its donations policy which provides financial support to local groups.

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### **Quality Infrastructure**

Maintaining and developing our infrastructure network to meet the ongoing needs of our population.



### **Strategic Objective**

- 4.1 Provide for replacement, improvement and additional Community and open space infrastructure through investment, best practice and risk management.
- 4.2 Provide inviting public spaces that are clean, green, properly maintained, well designed, encourage active participation, family friendly and accessible to all.
- 4.3 Provide safe and reliable water and sewerage services to meet the demands of current and future generations.
- 4.4 Upgrade and maintain the road network and bridges.
- 4.5 Advocate and improve access to communication services.

- Council provided additional public space in the form of St Aubins Square as part of the Scone CBD Revitalisation project. In addition the Scone CBD Revitalisation has provided additional community space with wider footpaths and more opportunity to use the street as a place making destination.
- The upgrade to the Kelly Street (Scone CBD) has resulted in better active participation in the commercial district of our largest centre.
- Council continues to provide water and sewer services that ensure safe and healthy access to essential services
- Council's focused investment in infrastructure, with a total expenditure of \$973,723 across bridges, footpaths, and roads, reflects our commitment to enhancing community connectivity and safety. Key expenditures include \$124,528 on regional roads and \$605,237 on rural unsealed roads.
- Council meets regularly with Telstra representatives to advocate for improved telecommunication services. Council leased land to Telstra to ensure improved coverage in Bunnan.



# Responsible Governance

Providing efficient and responsible governance in order to effectively serve the community.



### **Strategic Objective**

- 5.1 Effectively and efficiently manage the business of Council, while encouraging an open and participatory Council with an emphasis on transparency, community engagement, action and response.
- 5.2 Council is focused on innovation and continuous improvement to ensure a high quality of service which is aligned with business needs and community priorities.
- 5.3 Effective financial and asset management to ensure council's long-term sustainability.

- 5.4 Open and effective communication methods and technology are utilised to share information about Council plans, intentions, actions and progress.
- 5.5 Community is effectively engaged, can provide opinion and contribute to decisions that plan for the present and future of the Upper Hunter Shire.

- Council ensures robust governance through monthly Council and committee meetings, plus quarterly Community Advisory Committee (CAC) meetings, promoting transparency and community engagement.
- Council continually reviews its processes. The Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee (ARIC) oversee Council's operations and are specifically formed to review Risk and Improvements in the organisation.
- Management keeps Council updated on financial and asset management through monthly meetings of the Corporate Services Committee and Infrastructure Services Committee, excluding January. The Corporate Services Meeting reviews financial performance, including budget variations, cash and investments, loans, and capital works spending. The Infrastructure Meeting examines work programs and major project updates for transport, water, and sewer infrastructure, identifying potential risks. Every quarter, a detailed report is provided, offering in-depth analysis of significant budget variations across service areas.
- For the quarter, Council continued to increase its digital audience and reach on social media platforms, along with steady increases in usage for its website, which was updated in 2023.
- Council published 33 public notices on its website encouraging community feedback and contribution across development applications, public space consultation, Australia Day awards and Scone Cup Public Holiday. The transition to accessible mobile responsive electronic forms to facilitate user feedback has continued, supporting greater utilisation and participation.



# Responsible Governance

Providing efficient and responsible governance in order to effectively serve the community.



### **Strategic Objective**

- 5.6 Develop and maintain effective reporting systems that enable Council to measure and report on performance.
- 5.7 Effective management of risk underpins all Council decisions, service delivery and behaviours.
- 5.8 Develop leadership skills and build networks through a range of formal and informal opportunities.
- 5.9 Ensure Council is a great place to work by supporting Council employees in maximising their contribution.
- 5.10 Encourage and build strong partnerships between the Community, business and all levels of government to support implementation of the CSP 2032 and to deliver the Community priorities.
- 5.11 To participate and encourage regional coordination and planning between Councils and other organisations.
- 5.12 Provide timely and effective advocacy and leadership on key community issues and priorities.

- Council has effective financial, risk management, KPI reporting and other Governance tools to ensure it captures and reports relevant information to Councillors and the community.
- Council reviews its corporate risk register quarterly and reports this to ARIC.
- Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to leadership development, delivering a total of 24 group training sessions. These sessions, attended by 228 participants, were carefully designed to foster leadership skills and enhance connectivity among staff.
- Council's commitment to creating a supportive and engaging work environment is reflected in our impressive staff retention rate of 92%. This achievement underscores our success in fostering a culture where employees feel valued and empowered to maximise their contributions.
- Through our Community Advisory Committees, we ensure diverse community insights shape our strategies. Collaborations with local Chambers of Commerce and economic groups integrate business perspectives, while solid relationships with state and federal governments align our efforts with broader objectives.
- Council is member of the Hunter Joint Organisation and Committee for the Hunter. We have strong relationships with the Office of Local Government, Local Government NSW.
- Council advocated strongly for federal funding for MR358 rehabilitation, coordinating with State and Federal local members to place pressure on the Government to fulfill funding commitments.

# **KPI Summary**

Council is successfully meeting 79% of its 33 key performance indicators.

on track	19%
off track	15%
needs improvement	6%

Department	KPI	Status
Assets and Strategic Projects	Infrastructure Assets – 100% renewal ratios met	•
Assets and Strategic Projects	Project Mgt Cost - 6% of total project cost	•
Assets and Strategic Projects	Design of future work – 80% of two year works program complete	•
Business Services	10% improvement of performance of Business Services operations	•
Business Services	\$5m in economic uplift across the Shire from events and business initiatives	•
Business Services	80% of planned capital works and property development strategy	•
Community Services	80% utilisation of all Community Services facilities on a whole	•
Community Services	Total number of community engagement activities delivered > 100 per annum	•
Community Services	95% compliance of all service agreement and regulated requirements.	•
Finance	Financial Audit items met on time and annual returns submitted by the due date	•
Finance	Ensure sufficient working capital is available for ongoing solvency	•
Finance	Plant utilisation greater than 70%	•
Governance	100% of all regulatory deadlines met	•
Governance	90% of Audit actions completed by target date	•
Governance	90% of Fit for the Future ratios met	•

# **KPI Summary**

Department	KPI	Status
HR	85% staff retention	•
HR	Average time of recruitment measured from the date the requisition in HR Hub is approved to the date the letter of offer is signed is less than 10 weeks	•
HR	WH&S – LTIFR	•
IT	8 new process improvements undertaken with units to reduce time and improve accuracy of processes	•
IT	90% tickets completed within SLA	•
IT	95% of staff training around cyber security.	•
Planning	100% of inspection programs on target	•
Planning	Percentage of customer complaints responded to within 48 hours (95%)	•
Planning	Processing times of DAs (< 35 days)	•
Waste	25% Diversion of all waste from landfill	•
Waste	50% Kerbside diversion rates from landfill	•
Waste	Percentage of Sustainability targets met	•
Water and Sewer	100% water and sewer asset renewal as a percentage of depreciation	•
Water and Sewer	Capital Works completed	•
Water and Sewer	98% Supply of potable water for customers within Council's testing methods in the current financial year	•
Works	80% Capital Works completed	•
Works	90% Maintenance completed	•
Works	95% of Customer complaints closed within 14 days	•

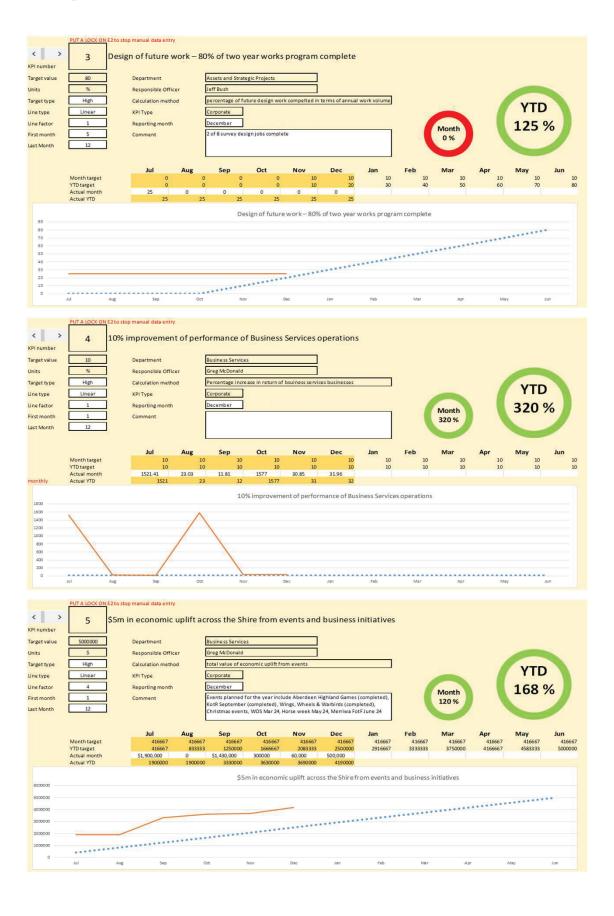
# Key Performance Indicators

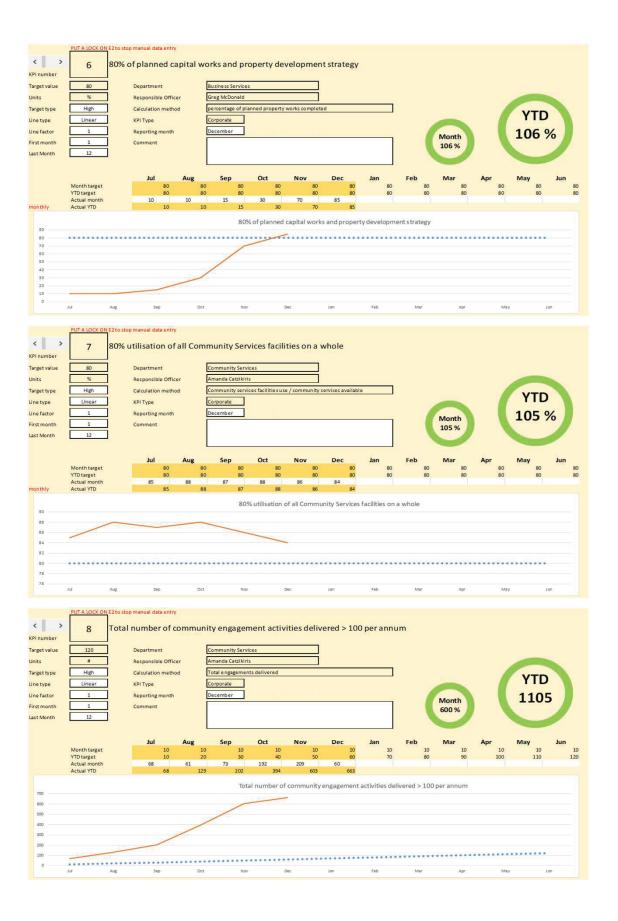
Council tracks its progress through 33 Key Performance Indicators.

### In this section

- KPI Summary
- KPI Report

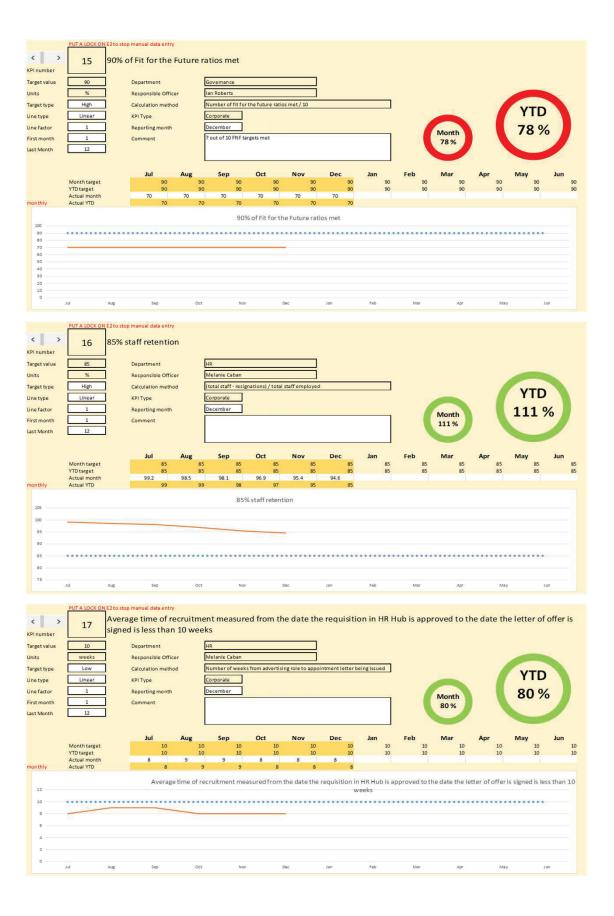




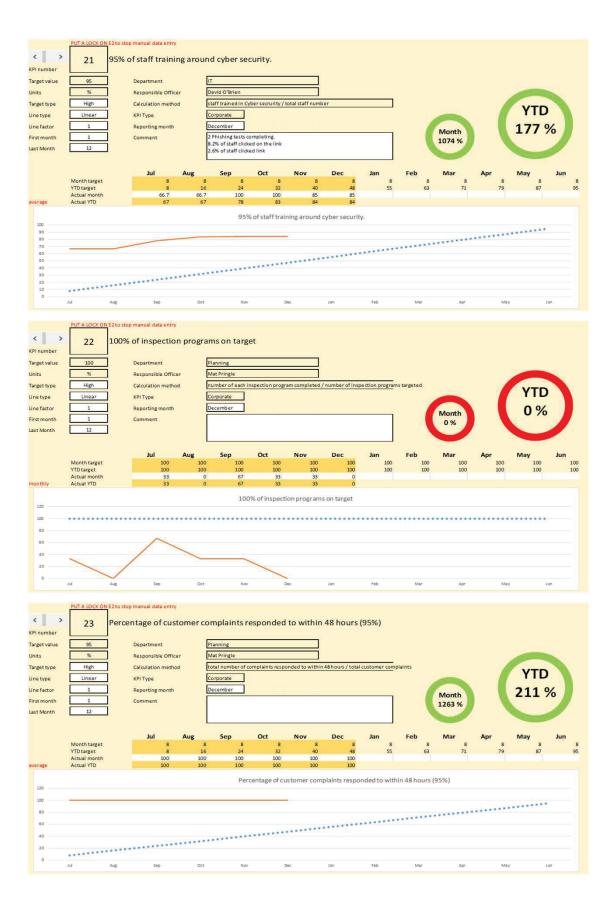




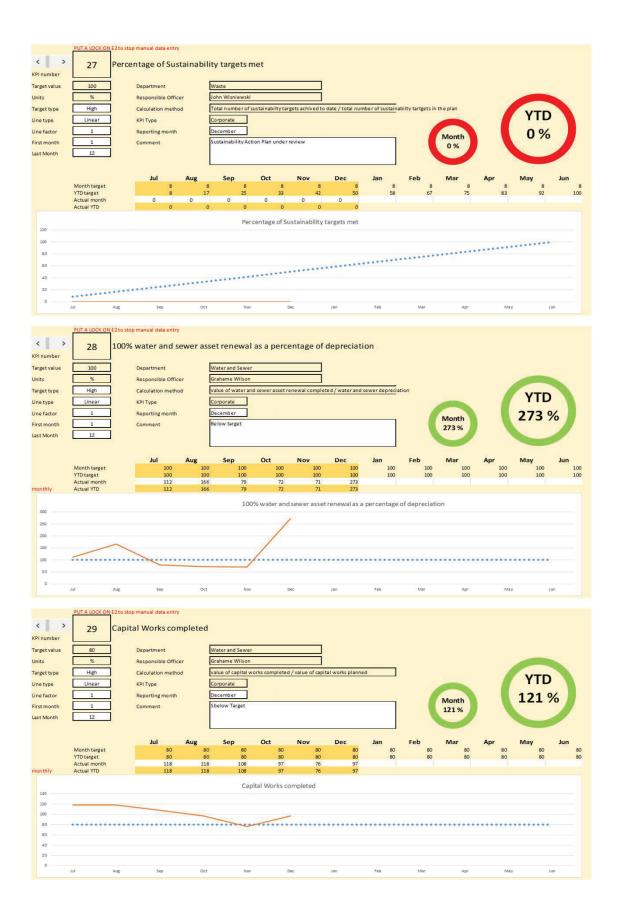




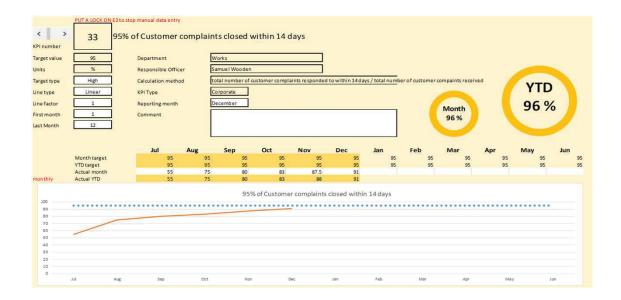












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