



Unconfirmed Minutes Council Meeting

Tuesday 17 March 2026 at 6.00 pm

**Council Chambers (and by video conferencing)
East Gippsland Shire Council Corporate Centre
273 Main Street, Bairnsdale 3875**

Councillors

Jodie Ashworth (Mayor), Tom Crook (Deputy Mayor), Arthur Allen, Sonia Buckley (Online), Barry Davis, Joanne Eastman, Ian Trevaskis, and John White

Attachments referenced in these minutes can be located in the meeting agenda on East Gippsland Shire Council's [website](#).

Vision

To foster inclusive, connected, communities and places where all East Gippslanders prosper, and endeavour not to leave anyone behind.

Our Strategic Themes

1. Community Wellbeing and Social Responsibility
2. Prosperity
3. Making the Most of What We've Got
4. Managing Council Well

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1 Procedural

1.1 Recognition of Traditional Custodians

Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth welcomed all to the Council meeting and acknowledged the traditional custodians.

Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of this land and pays deep respect to all First Nations peoples and communities with enduring cultural connections to East Gippsland, who have cared for and nurtured Country for tens of thousands of years.

We honour and celebrate the rich diversity, living cultures, and ongoing contributions of all First Nations peoples who live, work, visit, and play across East Gippsland.

We also acknowledge the many First Nations communities who, together, continue to shape and contribute to the region we know as East Gippsland. The place where we, as Local Government, deliver services and support to our community.

Procedural Note

Prior to the commencement of business, the Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth advised that, following consultation with the Chief Executive Officer, Item 5.2.1 – CON2026 1789 Bairnsdale Runway Extension and Lighting Construction Works was withdrawn from the agenda.

The item was not considered at this meeting and will be rescheduled for Council's consideration at a future meeting.

1.2 Apologies

Cr Bernie Farquhar

1.3 Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Nil

1.4 Confirmation of Minutes

Motion

That the minutes of the Council meeting held Tuesday 17 February 2026 be confirmed.

Moved: Cr Arthur Allen

Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

1.5 Next Meeting

The next scheduled Council Meeting is to be held on Tuesday 21 April 2026 at the Corporate Centre, 273 Main Street Bairnsdale commencing at 6.00 pm.

1.6 Requests for Leave of Absence

Nil

Procedural Note

At this point in proceedings, Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth acknowledged the following students who observed the meeting from the public gallery as part of their Junior Rotary Community Awards program:

- Sam Kelly from St Mary's Primary School; and
- Sophie Bloem from St Mary's Primary School.

To acknowledge their participation in this community program, the Mayor presented the students each with a Council pin.

1.7 Open Forum

1.7.1 Petitions

1.7.1.1 Open Nicholson Street Mall, Bairnsdale

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council:

- 1. receives the petition;***
- 2. notes that a report on this matter will be provided at a future Council meeting; and***
- 3. notes that the Chief Executive Officer will arrange for Council Officers to write to the head petitioner advising them of these actions.***

Moved: Cr Joanne Eastman

Seconded: Cr Sonia Buckley

Spoke for the motion: Cr Joanne Eastman and Cr Sonia Buckley

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

1.7.2 Questions of Council

1.7.2.1 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Genevieve Wilks submitted the following question which was read out on her behalf by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“It’s now been 4 weeks since you said at last council meeting that the report was a few weeks away from being finalised. What are the findings of the report?”*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: Council received an independent condition and safety report on the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool last week, and as per all reports of this nature, Officers are preparing a briefing for Councillors.

It’s a thorough report that highlights a significant list of structural, safety and compliance issues with the current facility and details the condition of the pool and all related infrastructure on site.

Officers will work with Councillors on the next steps and associated communications with the community following the briefing.

1.7.2.2 Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool

Ms Anne Daffy submitted the following questions which were read out on her behalf by Fiona Weigall Chief Executive Officer:

Question 1: *“What works are currently being carried out?”*

Question 2: *“What works are planned to ensure that there is no further deterioration to the outdoor pool complex prior to the 2026/27 season?”*

Chris Stephenson General Manager Place and Community provided a response which is summarised below:

Response 1: At the request of Councillors, an independent condition and safety report on the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool has been commissioned and completed. This will provide Councillors with details of required remediation works and associated costs to inform direction on next steps.

No work other than general maintenance of the grounds will be carried out until Councillors advise Officers on the strategic direction for the site.

Response 2: No work will be carried out until Councillors advise Officers on the strategic direction for the site.

1.7.3 Public Submissions

Nil

1.8 Items for Noting

1.8.1 Audit and Risk Committee Biannual Report

In accordance with section 54(5)(b) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, a copy of the Audit and Risk Committee Biannual Report is to be tabled and subsequently recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Attachments

1. Audit and Risk Committee Biannual Report - 1 July to 31 December 2025 [**1.8.1.1** - 7 pages]

2 Notices of Motion

Nil

3 Deferred Business

Nil

4 Councillor Delegate Reports

4.1 Cr Arthur Allen

South East Australian Transport Strategy Inc 19-20/02/26

The executive meeting was held from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm when delegates joined the meeting. All 18 delegates and Officers were in attendance. The Mayor of Eurobodalla welcomed attendees and opened the conference.

Teresa Lever Manager Economic Development and Place Activation, from Eurobodalla Shire provided a presentation of the Eurobodalla Economic briefing. The outstanding statistic was house prices, with the average house prices reported approximately \$962,000 and rental prices averaging \$650 per week. With a major hospital currently under construction at Batemans Bay, there is significant shortage of rental accommodation.

Main Roads NSW tabled a written report, possibly their last following their decision to withdraw from South East Australian Transport Strategy Inc (SEATS). This decision was met with disappointment by all present. However, the Executive Officer (EO) has been instructed to discuss the issue with the relevant Minister, given the important role their participation plays in ensuring good outcomes.

On Friday, the EO of Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Regional Futures Framework provided an overview of her work and how it impacts and links in with surrounding shire and state transport capacity. This was followed by Cross Border Commissioner, Kalina Koloff who outlined her role and some of the issues involved. She also discussed various issues affecting border shires, including Shoalhaven who border Jarvis Bay and part of the ACT.

Of great interest to East Gippsland was the effect of two bridges, one in Narooma and one near Bega, that cannot be used by B-double vehicles. This particularly effects Bonaccord, which can currently only run only semi-trailers to Sydney because back loading freight to South Coast Supermarkets cannot utilise more efficient B-double vehicles. As a result, the number of daily truck movements may effectively be halved.

Kalina Koloff is intending to visit East Gippsland with the Victorian Cross Border Commissioner, Brett Davis, in the coming weeks.

4.2 Cr Jodie Ashworth

17/02/26 - Councillor Briefing Session and Council Meeting

18/02/26 - Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) training – networking and State Election Platform Launch

19/02/26 - Meeting with Eastern Region Member Tom McIntosh Member of Parliament (MP) to advocate for East Gippsland

20/02/26 - One Gippsland Meeting

23/02/26 - Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

23/02/26 - Nicholson Street Mall meeting with the Hon. Darren Chester MP and Tim Bull MP

24/02/26 - Councillor Briefing Session

25/02/26 - Meeting with the Hon. Darren Chester MP to discuss Krauatungalung Walk

25/02/26 - Meeting with Lakes Entrance Action and Development Association (LEADA)

25/02/26 - Screening Launch – Tiny Move, Big Impact Documentary

26/02/26 - Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee Meeting

26/02/26 - Planning Consultation Meeting

27/02/26 - Gippsland Lakes Boat Show – Officials welcome and exhibitor function

28/02/26 - Women on Water – Connection women in the marine industry

01/03/26 - Community Impact Grant presentation to Marine Mammal Foundation
01/03/26 - Attended and made presentations at the end of the Paynesville Classic Boat Rally
02/03/26 - East Gippsland Active Transport Group Meeting
02/03/26 - Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remunerations Committee Meeting
02/03/26 - Planning Consultation Meeting
03/03/26 - Councillor Briefing Session
05/03/26 - Community Engagement meeting with National Australia Bank
07/03/26 - Attended and participated in the HOLI – Festival of Colour in the Nicholson Street Mall, Bairnsdale
08/03/26 - “Hooked on Lakes” – Official welcome and participation at the event
10/03/26 - Councillor Briefing Session
11/03/26 - Meeting with Gippsland Community Foundation
13/03/26 - Youth Ambassadors Camp
17/03/26 - Advocacy Priorities meeting
17/03/26 - Councillor Briefing and Council Meeting

4.3 Cr Tom Crook

February – March 2026

Overview

Alongside my ongoing Deputy Mayoral responsibilities, including supporting the Mayor, attending Councillor Briefings and undertaking statutory governance duties, I represented Council across a wide range of community, professional and regional engagements during February and March 2026.

The start of 2026 has been a particularly active period, reflecting strong community engagement, sector advocacy, inter-governmental collaboration and participation in professional development essential to effective local leadership.

Representation and Engagements

23 February 2026

- **Audit and Risk Committee Meeting**

I attended Council's Audit and Risk Committee meeting, welcoming new committee members. The Audit and Risk Committee is an independent advisory committee that supports Council in fulfilling its governance, financial management, and accountability responsibilities. Its primary role is to provide assurance to Council that appropriate systems, controls, and processes are in place to manage financial reporting, risk, compliance and organisational integrity.

- **Nicholson Street Mall Traders Meeting**

I met with key traders from the Nicholson Street Mall to discuss social unrest and anti-social behaviour and its impacts on local businesses.

While it was unfortunate that neither the local Federal nor State Members (the Hon. Darren Chester MP and Tim Bull MP) were able to attend, despite having supported the call for the meeting, the Mayor and I undertook to continue working closely with traders to support a safe, vibrant and commercially viable town centre.

25 February 2026

- Meeting with Waste and Sustainability Manager

I met with Council's Waste and Sustainability Manager to discuss Council's waste management framework, opportunities in industrial composting, and the management of Council owned natural areas on public land.

- Community Housing Documentary Screening – *Tiny Move, Big Impact*

I attended the screening of *Tiny Move, Big Impact*, a short documentary highlighting local responses to the housing crisis, including backyard tiny homes and community led housing support initiatives.

The documentary showcased examples from other councils, notably Mount Alexander Shire Council, demonstrating how allowing tiny houses on wheels as indefinite places of residence has supported ageing in place, increased housing security and encouraged local enterprise.

The screening served as a clear call to action for East Gippsland Shire Council, which has already passed a motion to amend local laws to allow tiny houses on wheels as homes. The film posed an important question: *why wait, when people need homes now and workable solutions already exist?*

- Homeshare in Action – Community Discussion

Following the screening, I participated in a facilitated discussion focused on the Homeshare model, exploring how people can safely share homes with support. The session provided practical information for community members interested in creating immediate housing solutions while broader policy reform continues.

26 February 2026

- Chief Executive Officer Employment and Remuneration Committee Meeting

I attended the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Employment and Remuneration Committee meeting, focusing on:

- Reviewing the timeline for development of the CEO Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and performance review framework.
- Discussing the CEO's quarterly KPI report.
- Reviewing the CEO Employment and Remuneration Policy.

2 March 2026

- Planning Consultation Meeting – Metung Road Subdivision Application

I attended a planning consultation meeting regarding Planning Application 5.2025.105.1 at 705 Metung Road, Metung, involving a three-lot subdivision and creation of a carriageway easement adjacent to Transport Zone 2 land.

The meeting included ten objectors, including East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority (EGCMA), who raised concerns relating to rainforest protection and waterway management but for reasons unknown did not attend the meeting. The matter will now be scheduled for a council meeting for decision.

6 March 2026

- Omeo and District Stakeholders Meeting (Chair)

I attended and chaired the Omeo and District Stakeholders meeting at Swifts Creek Community Hall.

The meeting brought together Councillors, Council executives, and regional stakeholders to discuss local priorities and collaboration opportunities.

Stakeholder representatives included:

Omeo Region Business and Tourism Association, Omeo District Health, Our Community Our Voice, Benambra Neighbourhood House, Omeo Community Hub, and the Swifts Creek Futures Committee.

- Community Grant Recipients

Following the meeting, I attended photo opportunities with the Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve Football and Netball Club and the Tambo Valley Golf Club, both recipients of Council Community Grant funding.

16 March 2026

- Australian Coastal Councils Association

I attended engagement with the Australian Coastal Councils Association, contributing to broader discussions on coastal governance, climate impacts, and shared regional advocacy.

Closing Statement

The first two months of 2026 have involved active representation across civic, community, and regional settings. These engagements continue to inform Council's strategic direction and support strong relationships with East Gippsland's diverse communities.

Through professional development, sector advocacy, and a consistent presence across the Shire, I remain committed to transparent, responsible, and community centred representation.

If you have any questions regarding my activities during this reporting period, please feel free to contact me.

4.4 Cr Joanne Eastman

I attended the Orbost Show which was a huge success, attended by more than 1300 people.

The weather was brilliant, and the crowd relaxed and happy. It was a big day for horse lovers from far and wide with multiple events for riders of all classes, ages and abilities. Landcare and related groups put on excellent well attended sustainability displays, and the Gippsland Agricultural Group attracted a lot of interest from farmers, particularly with the work they're doing on soil testing, topsoil improvement and helping dryland farmers become more resilient in the face of droughts.

Agencies (including the Shire), community and volunteer organisations appeared to be very happy with the interest showed by attendees. A huge congratulations is owed to the organising committee, sponsors and partners who must have spent thousands of hours putting together an exceptional event.

I attended a Financial Masterclass hosted by the Australian Local Government Women's Association that gave some very helpful advice in interpreting financial reports, including the most important performance indicators to ensure we continue to live within our means, maintain community infrastructure to the right levels, are able to meet our financial obligations and borrow responsibly. It also covered the type of information Councillors should be seeking when considering capital projects.

4.5 Cr John White

I attended weekly briefing sessions and two Planning Consultation Meetings.

5 Officer Reports

5.1 Chief Executive Officer

5.1.1 Homes for Everyone - Position Paper

Authorised by Chief Executive Officer

Motion

That Council adopts the Homes for everyone position paper as provided at Attachment 1.

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Joanne Eastman

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook, Cr Joanne Eastman and Cr Jodie Ashworth

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.1.2 MAV State Council May Meeting - Adoption of Motion

Authorised by Chief Executive Officer

Motion

That Council:

- 1. approves the Road maintenance and improvements motion provided as Attachment 1, for submission to the Municipal Association of Victoria State Council meeting to be held on 29 May 2026; and*
- 2. approves the Residential villages legislation changes motion, provided as Attachment 2, for submission to the Municipal Association of Victoria State Council meeting to be held on 29 May 2026.*

Moved: Cr Joanne Eastman

Seconded: Cr Tom Crook

Spoke for the motion: Cr Joanne Eastman and Cr Tom Crook

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.2 Assets and Environment

5.2.1 CON2026 1789 Bairnsdale Runway Extension and Lighting Construction Works

Authorised by General Manager Assets and Environment

Item 5.2.1 was withdrawn from business and will be considered at a future meeting.

5.3 Business Excellence

5.3.1 Domestic Animal Management Plan

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Procedural Note

Cr Sonia Buckley moved her own motion.

Motion

That Council:

1. *adopts the 2026-2029 Domestic Animal Management Plan as presented at Attachment 1 with the following additional action inserted under Priority 2 – Responsible Pet Ownership:*

<i>Action</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	<i>Evaluation Method</i>
<i>Promote the importance of animal welfare by increasing community awareness of existing off leash dog areas through periodic social media content and clear information on Council's website and signage for off leash areas</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>	<i>Social media engagement metrics; website page views; trends in off-leash related enquiries and complaints</i>

2. *publishes the 2026-2029 Domestic Animal Management Plan on Council's website;*
3. *authorises the CEO or Delegate to submit a copy of the adopted 2026-2029 Domestic Animal Management Plan to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action no later than 30 April 2026, in accordance with the approved extension of time;*
4. *requests that Action 1.5 in the Open Space Strategy relating to the development of an "Off-Leash Dog Park Provision Framework" is prioritised for completion by 30 June 2027; and*
5. *investigate funding sources, including potential grants to support delivery of the development of an Off-Leash Dog Park Provision Framework.*

Moved: Cr Sonia Buckley

Seconded: Cr Ian Trevaskis

Spoke for the motion: Cr Sonia Buckley and Cr Ian Trevaskis

Spoke against the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Joanne Eastman

Closed the debate: Cr Sonia Buckley

LOST

For: Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Tom Crook and Cr Joanne Eastman

Abstained: Cr Barry Davis

Procedural Note

In accordance with section 61(5)(e) of the *Local Government Act 2020*, a Councillor who is present at a meeting and abstains from voting is to be counted as a vote against the motion.

As the motion was lost, Council then proceeded to consider the officer recommendation.

Motion

That Council:

- 1. adopts the 2026-2029 Domestic Animal Management Plan as presented at Attachment 1;***
- 2. publishes the 2026-2029 Domestic Animal Management Plan on Council's website; and***
- 3. authorises the CEO or Delegate to submit a copy of the adopted 2026-2029 Domestic Animal Management Plan to the Secretary of the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action no later than 30 April 2026, in accordance with the approved extension of time.***

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.3.2 Delegations - Council to Members of Staff

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council:

- 1. approves the delegations to the members of Council staff holding, acting in or performing the duties of the offices or positions referred to in the S6 Instrument of Delegation as provided at Attachment 1 and the S18 Instrument of Sub-Delegation as provided at Attachment 2, subject to the conditions and limitations specified in those Instruments;*
- 2. resolves that the S6 Instrument of Delegation, provided at Attachment 1, and the S18 Instrument of Sub-Delegation, provided at Attachment 2, come into force immediately upon this resolution being made and are to be signed by the Chief Executive Officer;*
- 3. revokes the S6 Instrument of Delegation from Council to Members of Staff dated 22 November 2022 and the S18 Instrument of Sub-Delegation dated 1 February 2022 upon the coming into force of the Instruments provided at Attachments 1 and 2; and*
- 4. notes that the duties and functions set out in both Instruments must be performed, and the powers set out in both Instruments must be executed, in accordance with any policies of Council that it may from time to time adopt.*

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Joanne Eastman

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Joanne Eastman

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook, Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

5.3.3 Organisations Performance Report - September to December 2025

Authorised by General Manager Business Excellence

Motion

That Council:

- 1. endorses the full year forecast operating and capital budgets, as included in the Organisations Performance Report, provided at Attachment 1, for the period to 1 October to 31 December 2025;***
- 2. notes that the Chief Executive Officer has determined that no revised budget is required for the 2025/26 financial year;***
- 3. notes we are currently reviewing the capital budget forecast and will provide an update in Quarter 3; and***
- 4. notes that if endorsed, the Organisations Performance Report for the period to 31 December 2025, provided at Attachment 1, will be published on Council's website.***

Moved: Cr Tom Crook

Seconded: Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke for the motion: Cr Tom Crook and Cr Arthur Allen

Spoke against the motion: Nil

Closed the debate: Nil

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

For: Cr Arthur Allen, Cr Jodie Ashworth, Cr Sonia Buckley, Cr Tom Crook,
Cr Barry Davis, Cr Joanne Eastman, Cr Ian Trevaskis and Cr John White

Against: Nil

Abstained: Nil

6 Urgent Business

Nil

7 Confidential Business

Nil

8 Close of Meeting

Mayor Cr Jodie Ashworth declared the Council Meeting closed at 7.30 pm.

AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

BIANNUAL REPORT | JULY - DECEMBER 2025



Introduction

East Gippsland Shire Council (Council) is required under section 53(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* (Act) to establish an Audit and Risk Committee (Committee). Section 54(1) of the Act further requires Council to adopt a Committee Charter (Charter) that outlines the Committee's objectives, authority, composition, tenure, roles and responsibilities, and its reporting, administrative and governance arrangements.

Following several vacancies among the Independent Members, it was timely for Council to review the Charter to ensure it remains contemporary and aligned with best-practice governance. In preparation for the recruitment process to fill these vacancies, Council requested amendments to the Committee composition to include three Independent Members, one Councillor Member, and the Mayor as ex-officio. This updated structure enhances the Committee's independence and its oversight capability.

Feedback from the Committee's 2024/25 Annual Performance Review also informed the proposed Charter amendments. The review identified opportunities to strengthen clarity, independence, and good governance practice, including improving appointment processes, reinforcing member responsibilities, and removing outdated or unnecessary provisions.

Key amendments to the Charter include:

- establishing a Recruitment Panel comprising the Mayor, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and a Councillor member of the Committee;
- clarifying that the Independent Chair is appointed by Council; and
- formalising the practice of providing the Committee's meeting minutes to Council for noting, enhancing transparency and supporting community understanding of governance processes.

Section 54(5)(a) of the Act also requires the Committee to prepare a biannual audit and risk report that outlines its activities, findings and recommendations. This report must be provided to the CEO for tabling at the next practicable Council meeting.

This Report outlines the activities of the Committee for the period of July to December 2025.

Membership

In November, the Committee experienced several vacancies, with the retirement of the Chair, Celeste Gregory, and Independent Member, Claudia Goldsmith, along with the resignation of Independent Member, Jason Hellyer.

Following these changes, Council amended the Committee's composition to include three Independent Members, one Councillor Member, and the Mayor as an ex-officio member. This updated structure aligns with best-practice governance and strengthens the Committee's independence and oversight capability. The current membership of the Committee, including changes that occurred during the reporting period, is set out below:

Council Representatives

Mayor, Cr Jodie Ashworth
Councillor Member – Cr Joanne Eastman

Independent Members

Mr Mark Dupe (Chair)
Ms Susan Lloyd
Ms Sarah Philpott

Meetings and Attendance

In accordance with the Charter in place at the time, the Committee held quarterly ordinary meetings and an annual joint meeting with Councillors in October. Although this requirement has since been removed in the revised Charter, the October joint meeting proceeded as scheduled and provided an opportunity for the Committee and Councillors to discuss key strategic matters, including the Annual Financial Statement 2024/25 and Performance Statement 2024/25.

As detailed in the Charter, a quorum requires four or more Committee Members to be present, with the number of Independent Members equal to or greater than the number of Councillor members. Meetings held during the reporting period complied with these quorum requirements.

The Committee was scheduled to meet on 24 November 2025. However, due to multiple resignations, as mentioned earlier, the Committee was unable to form a quorum, and the meeting was subsequently cancelled.

The Committee met two times during the reporting period:

Meeting Date	Type
25 August 2025	Ordinary Committee Meeting
7 October 2025	Joint Committee Meeting

In accordance with the Charter, Councillors who are not members of the Committee may attend Committee meetings as observers.

The CEO, General Manager Business Excellence, Manager Governance and Regulatory Services and the Committee Secretariat will, when practicable and appropriate, attend all meetings of the Committee. Other members of Council staff may be invited to attend meetings to present reports. Attendance during the reporting period is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1

Member	Role	25 August	7 October
Celeste Gregory	Independent Chair	✓	✓
Claudia Goldsmith	Independent Member	✓	x
Susan Lloyd	Independent Member	✓	✓
Jason Hellyer	Independent Member	x	✓
Cr John White	Mayor	✓	✓
Cr Jodie Ashworth	Councillor Representative	✓	✓
Cr Joanne Eastman	Councillor Representative	✓	✓

✓ = In Attendance x = Apology ∅ = Not Required

Internal Audit

A key responsibility of the Committee is to monitor Council’s internal audit program. The internal audit function of Council is supported by the engagement of independent Internal Audit professionals to provide analysis and recommendations aimed at improving Council’s governance, risk, and management controls.

In May 2025, the Committee endorsed the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan, following a request at the February 2025 meeting for a broader range of potential audit areas to be presented for consideration. Officers subsequently identified 11 possible audit areas, enabling the Committee to determine priorities within the annual contracted 280 audit hours. The Committee’s endorsement of the plan reflects its commitment to a risk-based, well-targeted internal audit program aligned with Council’s strategic and operational needs.

The Committee continues to monitor progress against the Internal Audit Plan at each meeting. A representative from Crowe Australasia attended all meetings during the reporting period to present audit findings, discuss progress on scheduled audits, and provide updates on follow-up activities relating to previous audit recommendations.

Implementation of Audit Recommendations

In accordance with the Charter, the Committee is also responsible for monitoring progress on actions required to achieve rectification of any issues identified following an Internal Audit. At the meeting held on 25 August 2025, the Committee noted the following progress:

Internal Audit Area	Number of Actions							
	In Quarterly Report	Completed	On Schedule	Behind Schedule	Not Commenced	On Hold	Not Updated	Withdrawn
Child Safety Standards	1		1					
Governance	3	1	2					
Procurement Tendering	2	1		1				
Workforce Planning	6	3	3					

External Audit

The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) appointed RSD Audit to complete external audits of Council under the *Audit Act 1994*. A representative of RSD Audit attends meetings as required. The 2024/25 Final Management Letter was presented to the Committee at its meeting of 7 October 2025.

Annual Work Program

The meeting agenda is driven by the Committee's Annual Work Program, which was formally endorsed at the meeting held 26 February 2025. The matters from the Annual Work Program considered by the Committee at each meeting are provided in **Table 2**.

Key Highlights

The key highlights for the Committee during the current reporting period were:

- Council's risk management framework and policy enhancements, with continued improvement in maturity noted over the past six months.
- Internal audits conducted during the year recognised Council's efforts to ensure risks are effectively controlled.
- Significant progress on the Digital Transformation Program, including implementation of new finance, procurement, HR, and GIS systems to improve efficiency and compliance.
- Cyber security remained a key focus, with all compliance and improvement initiatives completed, no major incidents reported, and alignment with Victorian Protective Data Security Standards and the Australian Signals Directorate's Essential Eight Maturity Model.
- Review and endorsement of the updated Asset Valuation Policy, ensuring compliance with AASB 13 Fair Value Measurement amendments.
- Monitoring of the Workforce Plan 2021–2025, including achievements in succession planning, capability development, and diversity and inclusion initiatives.
- Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and Safety Management System maturity noted, including improvements in compliance and reporting.
- Progress on overdue Council policies acknowledged, with updates provided on completion timelines and legislative compliance.
- Insurance claims management reviewed, with actions by Officers noted as appropriate.

The Committee received and considered reports/information on the following key areas of interest:

- Councillor expenses reviewed at scheduled meetings, confirming expenditure remains within allowances and no abnormalities identified.
- Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality declarations presented for the calendar year, with no irregularities detected.
- Consideration of a broad range of internal audit reports, including reviews of complaints management, procurement, workforce planning, and governance, and monitoring of audit recommendations.

The Committee also received and considered a number of reports that are confidential in accordance with section 3 of the Act. Accordingly, these have not been included in the above key highlights or areas of interest.

Table 2

Audit and Risk Committee Annual Work Program 2025						
Reports	August		October		November	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Officer Reports						
Organisational Performance Quarterly Report					✓	
Quarterly Councillors' Expenses Report	✓	✓			✓	
Quarterly Strategic Risk Management Report (Inc Risk Register)	✓	✓			✓	
Biannual Occupational Health and Safety Report					✓	
Quarterly Major Insurance and Legal Claims Report	✓	✓			✓	
ICT and Cyber Security Update	✓	✓			✓	
Annual Council Policies Report	✓	✓				
Biennial Fraud Control Report					✓	
Annual Investment Report	✓	x				
Annual Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Report	✓	✓				
Annual Delegations Review					✓	
Review Draft Financial Report and Performance Statement			✓	✓		
Audit Matters						
Internal Audit Plan Progress Update	✓	✓			✓	
Internal Audit Recommendations - Actions Update Report	✓	✓			✓	
Internal Auditor - Annual Meeting (Committee Only)	✓	x				
External Auditor - Annual Meeting (Committee Only)			✓	✓		
External Auditor - Final Management Letter			✓	✓		
Committee Matters						
Actions Arising Update	✓	✓			✓	
Annual Work Program - Adoption					x	
Biannual Activity Report	✓	✓				
Annual Work Program - Progress Report	✓	✓			✓	
Annual Performance Assessment			✓	x	x	
Emerging Issues						
Quarterly Emerging Issues Report	✓	✓			✓	
Strategic Focus Areas - Presentations						
Generative AI and Cyber Risk	✓	✓				

Reports	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Unplanned Reports						
Workforce Plan 2021-25 Progress Report		✓				
Municipal Monitors Report - Colac Otway Shire Council		✓				
Internal Audit Report - Follow Up		✓				
Internal Audit Report - Complaints Management		✓				
Parliamentary Inquiry into Fraud and Corruption Control in Local Government		✓				
Updated Asset Valuation Policy		✓				
Digital Transformation Program		✓				
Quarterly Occupational Health and Safety Report		✓				
CEO Update		✓				
Annual Performance Assessment 2024/25			✓	x		