

Te Uru Kahika Business Plan Overview

2026 - 2027



Supporting each other through change

The year ahead is likely to be one of the most significant periods of change regional and unitary authorities have faced in decades. The combined impacts of Resource Management System reform, local government reform, infrastructure and funding pressures, and changing community expectations will challenge many of the assumptions that have underpinned local government for a generation. While the precise shape of future institutional arrangements is not yet known, one thing is clear: regional councils, unitary authorities, and the people who work within them will play a critical role in successfully transitioning to whatever future model emerges.

This Business Plan reflects our best understanding of the operating environment at the time of writing. However, reform programmes remain dynamic and many key decisions are still to be made by Government. As a result, this plan is intentionally designed to be adaptive. Te Uru Kahika will continue to monitor developments closely and will pivot our priorities, resources and work programmes as new information becomes available. Our ability to respond quickly, share intelligence, and align collective effort has become one of the sector's greatest strengths and will remain essential over the coming year.

At the heart of that capability sits the Te Uru Kahika SIG Network. The network represents one of the sector's most important strategic assets. Through collaboration, shared expertise, collective problem solving and leadership across functional areas, the SIGs enable councils to achieve outcomes that would be difficult, costly or impossible to deliver alone. As future delivery models are considered, the principles embodied by the SIG network—working across organisational boundaries, sharing capability, developing common approaches, and focusing on outcomes rather than structures—provide a strong foundation for how regional functions can continue to be delivered effectively regardless of the institutional arrangements that emerge.

The focus of this Business Plan has therefore shifted toward the two areas where coordinated sector leadership is most urgently required: implementation of the future Resource Management System and preparation for Local Government Reform. These priorities do not diminish the importance of our other workstreams. Rather, they recognise that every area of our collective programme—from freshwater and bio-management through to transport, science, data, risk and resilience, and kaupapa Māori—will have an important role to play in supporting successful reform implementation and transition.

The year ahead will require flexibility, discipline and a willingness to work together in new ways. By remaining focused on the functions we deliver, supporting each other through change, and drawing on the strength of our collective expertise, we can help ensure that regional government continues to deliver value for communities, the economy and the environment throughout this period of transformation.

Iain Maxwell
Executive Director
Te Uru Kahika

What we offer

Te Uru Kahika is the collective of New Zealand's sixteen regional and unitary authorities.¹ Together, we are charged with the integrated management of natural and physical resources, regional transport planning and provision of public transport services in our regions.

Councils can achieve more, at lower cost to communities, when we work together on common challenges

Collectively, regional and unitary authorities have significant practical experience and specialist expertise. Our role means that we have connections to communities across the motu, and relationships with tangata whenua at place. We coordinate and deliver results across domains like biodiversity, climate adaptation, flood management, CDEM and freshwater. Te Uru Kahika provides an efficient point of entry for Government to seek advice on the practicability of proposed policy and for delivery at a local level.

Working together nationally helps us to deliver for communities and the environment regionally through:

- Advantages of scale
- Influence of national policy and implementation
- Streamlining Government investment
- Tools and information
- Support in a crisis
- Breadth of expertise
- Learning from each other
- Reduced transaction costs
- A unified approach

¹ Auckland Council is currently only participating in and contributing to limited Te Uru Kahika activities.

Guiding principles

Our work together is guided by four overarching principles:

Hautūtanga	Keeping time in the waka we speak with one voice. We are connected with a willingness to work together and with others. We support our leadership to make sound decisions.
Hāpaitia	We are enabling, supportive and uplifting.
Haere Ngātahi	We work in partnership with Māori and acknowledge our combined knowledge, wisdom, experience and vision.
Ngākau Māhaki	We leave any puehu (dust) we gather from the outside world at the door. We enter with humility and respect for all, conducting our work with grace, dignity and an open mind.

Getting the job done

Collaboration across councils helps Regional Chief Executive Officers (RCEOs) to deliver results for their local communities.

Te Uru Kahika SIG network

The SIG Network plays a vital role in championing best practice, information sharing and collaboration across councils and with external organisations. Groups exist across the functional domains of regional authorities, as illustrated in the structure chart below. An outline of the SIG network, including current convenors, is available on [MahiTahi](#).

Convenors and other leaders work across SIGs to deliver on our strategic priorities. Often, these cross-sector priorities receive dedicated support through the Virtual Office.

Te Uru Kahika Virtual Office

The Virtual Office provides strategic advice and targeted capacity to support RCEOs and SIG leaders to progress strategic priorities in the context of a growing workload. Dedicated support is in place for strategic priorities of resource management, climate adaptation, freshwater and kaupapa māori, as well as to align effort in bio-management, science, data and communications. Contact details are available on our [website](#).

Te Uru Kahika Virtual Team

The Virtual Team brings together Lead SIG convenors and Virtual Office staff to support coordination and communication across the network.

Regional Software Holdings Limited (RSHL)

All Staff and contractors working on behalf of Te Uru Kahika are formally engaged by RSHL. RSHL is the shared services organisation for Te Uru Kahika.

Doing less, better

Pooling resource offers councils many benefits – allowing us to develop solutions collectively that we could not individually, draw on a broader range of expertise, and share the load across many functions. Together, we can achieve more, at less cost, for our regions.

Over the next 12 months, however, the scale of reform requires greater strategic discipline about where we direct our effort.

The two primary priorities identified in this Business Plan – Resource Management System Reform and Transition, and Local Government Reform and Future Delivery Models – represent the areas where coordinated sector leadership is most urgently required.

The supporting workstreams outlined in this plan remain critical to the success of the regional sector. Their role over the coming year is both to continue delivering value in their own right and to support the successful implementation of broader reform.

The active support of RCEO sponsors remains crucial to success in each of these areas. The SIG network also continues to play a vital role in sharing information, building capability, and maintaining operational excellence across the wider span of regional functions.

In the context of constrained funding, reform fatigue, and significant delivery expectations, there are more worthy initiatives than we can progress simultaneously. We will therefore continue to manage work programmes and budgets dynamically throughout the year, responding to emerging Government decisions, operational pressures and opportunities for collective impact.

This approach ensures Te Uru Kahika remains agile, strategically aligned, and focused on the areas where working together can deliver the greatest value for councils, communities and the environment.

Business Plan Strategic Priorities

The scale, pace and interconnected nature of reform facing regional and unitary authorities over the next 12 months requires Te Uru Kahika to sharpen its collective focus. While all our work programmes remain important to the delivery of regional functions and outcomes for communities, two areas stand above all others at this time in terms of strategic significance and sector-wide impact:

- Resource Management System Reform and Transition
- Local Government Reform and Future Delivery Models

These two reform programmes have the potential to fundamentally reshape the operating environment, institutional arrangements, funding settings, and delivery mechanisms for regional government in New Zealand.

As a result, the Business Plan for 2026–2027 adopts a more integrated structure. Existing priority areas remain active and significant but are now positioned as enabling and supporting workstreams that contribute to successful implementation of the new Resource Management system and wider Local Government reform.

This approach does not diminish the importance of risk and resilience (climate adaptation), freshwater, transport, bio-management, science and data or kaupapa Māori. Rather, it recognises that over the coming year these areas must increasingly orient toward supporting sector readiness, transition capability, system implementation, and the positioning of regional functions within future delivery models. Some initiatives may need to be paused or slowed down if they are not supporting the primary priorities.

The interconnected nature of regional council responsibilities means that successful reform implementation depends on maintaining strength and capability across all of these domains. The following structure therefore reflects both the urgency of reform and the enduring importance of the wider regional sector work programme.

Primary priority one

Future Resource Management System Transition and Implementation

The resource management system lies at the heart of many of the functions carried out by regional and unitary councils. The anticipated passing of replacement RM legislation before the 2026 general election will initiate one of the most significant implementation and transition programmes the sector has faced in decades.

The focus of our work is therefore shifting from policy design toward implementation readiness, transition support, and coordinated sector delivery.

The transition period beginning in 2026–2027 will require councils to simultaneously:

- Prepare for enactment and phased implementation of new legislation
- Influence key national direction, standards and regulations
- Ensure continuity of service delivery throughout transition
- Build system capability across people, data, tools and governance
- Position regional functions effectively within future institutional arrangements
- Maintain confidence with communities, iwi/hapū, central government and delivery partners

This work will require a highly coordinated sector-wide response. Success will depend not only on RM-specific expertise, but on the ability of all regional functions to align around implementation and delivery.

Our work programme will therefore focus on the components of reform that:

- Are most significant for the regional sector
- Have the greatest implications for councils and communities
- Require collective action and shared capability
- Offer opportunities for national consistency and efficiency
- Support durable and implementable long-term outcomes

Key Supporting Workstreams

Kaupapa Māori

Kaupapa Māori remains essential to successful implementation of the future RM system and broader system legitimacy. The priority for 2026–2027 is ensuring councils retain practical capability, trusted relationships and implementation confidence during a period of significant institutional and legislative change.

This workstream will support councils to:

- Steward Te Tiriti partnership systems through local government and RM transition and change
- Maintain trusted relationships with iwi and hapū during transition and into new entities and systems
- Integrate whenua-based perspectives into system design and implementation, including through key system levers such as spatial planning
- Reduce legal, relational and reputational risk
- Support practical implementation capability across councils and SIG networks

- Maintain continuity and consistency in engagement approaches during reform including appropriate stewardship and transfer of mātauranga Māori and iwi-provided information during reform
- Support durable place-based outcomes for te taiao and te wai

Practical work will focus on targeted advice, implementation support, relationship continuity, shared learning, leadership guidance where required, and integration of iwi and hapū partnership considerations across reform implementation. The emphasis will remain on practical system stewardship and reducing implementation risk.

Freshwater

Freshwater reform and implementation remains one of the most significant operational components of the future RM system.

The focus for 2026–2027 will be on:

- Supporting implementation of revised freshwater policy settings
- Promoting nationally consistent approaches to catchment delivery
- Supporting Freshwater Farm Plan implementation
- Working with central government on wastewater standards and regulatory tools
- Strengthening practitioner alignment and implementation capability
- Positioning catchment-based delivery as a core strength of regional government

Freshwater workstreams will increasingly align with wider RM transition, environmental limits, spatial planning and integrated catchment management initiatives.

Bio-Management

Biosecurity and biodiversity functions must remain strongly embedded within future RM and local government arrangements.

This workstream will focus on:

- Positioning biodiversity and biosecurity functions within future system design
- Supporting transition readiness for new planning and delivery frameworks
- Developing consistent national methodologies and tools
- Improving alignment of regional pest management approaches
- Strengthening the sector's value proposition and public understanding
- Supporting integrated catchment and spatial planning approaches

Collective approaches to biodiversity and biosecurity management will continue delivering efficiencies and improved outcomes across regions.

Science, Data and Insights

Science and data capability underpins effective implementation of the future RM system.

This workstream will support reform implementation through:

- Environmental limits and constraints mapping
- Regional spatial planning support – including iwi provided knowledge/matauranga
- Shared data standards and interoperability
- National Environmental Monitoring Standards (NEMS)
- LAWA platform enhancement and public information tools
- Data federation and digital capability uplift

- Coordinated scientific input into national reform processes
- Strengthening the evidence base for decision-making

The role of science and data will become increasingly critical as councils transition toward new planning, monitoring and reporting frameworks.

Risk and Resilience

Risk and resilience workstreams support implementation of integrated planning and hazard management approaches through the future RM system.

This programme will focus on:

- Integration of hazard information into spatial planning and infrastructure investment
- Flood risk management and investment planning
- Alignment between emergency management reform and RM reform
- Adaptive recovery and long-term resilience planning
- Improved hazard information systems and public communication
- Insurance, liability and risk management considerations

This work strengthens the sector's ability to support communities through increasingly complex climate and hazard-related challenges while aligning with future planning frameworks.

Transport

Transport reform and planning systems are closely connected to broader RM system implementation and future spatial planning arrangements.

The transport programme will focus on:

- Supporting transport system alignment with RM reform
- Preparing for interaction between transport, spatial planning and infrastructure systems
- Supporting sector capability and readiness
- Coordinated engagement with central government
- Data, technology and ticketing system readiness
- Maintaining continuity and resilience through reform

Regional transport functions remain critical enablers of economic development, resilience and community wellbeing.

Primary priority two

Local Government Reform and Future Delivery Models

The Government is pursuing a programme of local government reform intended to refocus councils on “the basics”, reconsider delivery responsibilities, and improve efficiency and affordability across the system.

This reform programme has potentially significant implications for:

- The future structure of local government
- The scale and form of regional delivery

- Funding mechanisms and investment models
- Shared services and collaborative delivery
- Allocation of functions between central, regional and local entities
- Long-term institutional arrangements

The sector must therefore be prepared to respond rapidly and strategically as Government decisions unfold.

Our focus over the next 12 months will be on ensuring that:

- Regional functions remain visible, understood and valued
- Future delivery arrangements are practical and implementable
- Councils are positioned to influence reform outcomes
- Shared service opportunities and sector efficiencies are progressed
- The sector maintains operational continuity through change
- Relationships with central government and stakeholders remain constructive
- Communities continue to receive effective regional services
- Mana whenua agreements and commitments are embedded into new entities and delivery arrangements

The pace and uncertainty of reform means our work programme must remain agile and responsive. Work in this priority area will be funded under the 'alternative' model with only Regional Councils contributing to it. Unitary Councils will not fund this work.

Key Supporting Workstreams

Business Services

Business Services provides the coordination, communications and organisational capability required to support the sector through a period of intense reform and transition.

This workstream enables:

- Coordination across the RCEO group and SIG network
- Strategic communications and public positioning
- Support for political engagement and stakeholder management
- Agile response capability as reform evolves
- Shared services exploration and implementation
- Programme coordination across multiple reforms
- Organisational continuity and sector alignment

The Business Services function is critical to ensuring the wider Te Uru Kahika network can operate cohesively and pivot rapidly as circumstances change.

Science, Data and Insights

Local Government reform will increasingly require strong evidence, credible data, and clear articulation of the value delivered by regional functions.

This workstream will support reform through:

- Demonstrating the value and scale of regional science capability
- Supporting evidence-based decisions on future delivery models

- Improving cross-sector consistency and interoperability
- Enhancing resilience and shared capability across councils
- Supporting integrated service delivery approaches
- Maintaining trusted public-facing environmental information

Science and data capability will remain a strategic asset for the regional sector throughout reform discussions.

Bio-Management

Bio-management functions provide a practical example of where regional-scale delivery creates efficiency, consistency and improved environmental outcomes.

This workstream will:

- Demonstrate the value of regional-scale delivery models
- Support discussion on future functional arrangements
- Strengthen national consistency and shared delivery approaches
- Improve efficiency through collaborative tools and methodologies
- Position biodiversity and biosecurity as critical regional functions

Risk and Resilience

The increasing scale of hazard and infrastructure challenges reinforces the importance of effective regional coordination and delivery capability.

This workstream contributes to reform discussions through:

- Demonstrating the need for regionally coordinated hazard management
- Supporting investment planning and infrastructure prioritisation
- Exploring insurance and risk-sharing solutions
- Improving integration across planning, infrastructure and emergency management systems
- Highlighting the importance of long-term resilience capability

Transport

Transport provides a clear example of the importance of coordinated regional planning, funding and service delivery.

This programme will support reform conversations by:

- Demonstrating the value of regional transport coordination
- Supporting system integration and long-term planning
- Strengthening regional capability and consistency
- Supporting public transport funding sustainability
- Improving sector readiness for technological and operational change

Kaupapa Māori

Kaupapa Māori workstreams remain essential to ensuring future local government arrangements maintain trusted relationships, durable outcomes and Treaty-aligned approaches.

This work supports reform by:

- Maintaining continuity of iwi and hapū relationships during transition
- Supporting leadership capability and confidence

- Reducing relational and implementation risks
- Ensuring Māori perspectives inform future system design
- Supporting enduring place-based partnerships and outcomes

Freshwater

Freshwater delivery provides a practical demonstration of integrated regional planning, catchment management and environmental stewardship.

This workstream supports reform discussions by:

- Demonstrating the effectiveness of regional-scale catchment management
- Supporting consistent implementation capability
- Strengthening integrated planning and delivery approaches
- Highlighting the value of coordinated regional environmental management