



**Waikato
wellbeing
project**

Research . Knowledge . Storytelling

Hinonga
toiora o
Waikato

ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT

February 2026





Waikato Wellbeing Project.

Annual Progress Report: February 2026

1. Introduction

Ma te whakaatu, ka mohio
Ma te mohio, ka marama
Ma te marama, ka matau
Ma te matau, ka ora

By discussion, comes understanding
By understanding, comes light
By light, comes wisdom
By wisdom, comes wellbeing

Over the past year, the Waikato Wellbeing Project (WWP) has continued to work in the space where complexity, uncertainty and opportunity intersect. Our purpose remains unchanged: to help the Waikato region better understand and respond to the “wicked” wellbeing challenges that no single organisation, policy or programme can solve alone.

This Annual Progress Report reflects a year of steady delivery, deeper learning, and important strategic decisions about the future of the project. Despite increasing complexity across the social, economic and political environment, the WWP has progressed strongly against its 2025–26 Business Plan. Activity delivery has remained high, output achievement has improved, and several areas of work have exceeded expectations in both quality and influence.

The WWP is not a service delivery agency, a funder, or a policy maker. Our role is to convene, connect, inform and challenge — working between communities, iwi, local government, funders and central agencies to surface insight, amplify lived experience, and support collective action.

This operating model continues to be both necessary and valued, particularly as pressures on households, whānau and communities intensify.

Three areas of work have been especially significant over the past year.

- First, our **kai and food security work** has reinforced the central role that kai plays as an upstream determinant of wellbeing. Through lived-experience research, mātauranga Māori-led engagement, regional hui and national advocacy, this work has strengthened community voice, informed policy conversations, and contributed to a growing, region-wide movement focused on kai motuhake and long-term food system resilience.
- Second, through **Te Ara Poutama**, the WWP has continued to build the region’s wellbeing knowledge base. Projects such as the Hauraki Opportunity, housing affordability analysis, and the draft State of the Region Report provide locally grounded, accessible evidence about what matters most to people in the Waikato. This work is increasingly being used by councils, funders, community organisations and iwi to inform planning, investment and service design.
- Third, **Lots of Little Fires** has continued to demonstrate the power of storytelling as a legitimate form of evidence. By elevating community-defined solutions and lived experience, the programme has influenced policy conversations, strengthened sector learning, and helped shift how leadership and impact are understood. The transition of

Lots of Little Fires to Seed Waikato marks both an evolution of the programme and a deliberate step to ensure its long-term sustainability beyond the WWP.

Alongside delivery, a significant focus this year has been on the future of the Waikato Wellbeing Project itself. Following the conclusion of the Kaitiaki Advisory Board's term, a Transition Leadership Group was established to guide decisions on the next stage of the Project. Extensive engagement with stakeholders confirmed strong support for the WWP's continuation, alongside a clear expectation that it continues to evolve, strengthen its independence, and sharpen its focus on translating insight into action.

As a result, the Transition Leadership Group has agreed that all practicable steps should be taken to continue the WWP as an enduring part of the region's wellbeing leadership ecosystem. Work is now underway to establish an independent charitable trust, and to secure funding for a "hub and spoke" operating model that protects the Project's core functions while enabling flexible, partnership-led initiatives. On the back of the successful Social Investment Summit held in November with Trust Waikato, Waikato Tainui and the Social Investment Agency, we will explore how the WWP might play a key role in further embedding this approach in the Waikato in 2026.

This report does not claim ownership of outcomes. Progress on wellbeing is the result of collective effort — by communities, iwi, councils, funders, practitioners and leaders across the region. Our contribution is to help make those efforts more visible, more connected, and more effective.

We close by acknowledging, with genuine appreciation, the funders, partners and manu taki whose confidence and commitment make this work possible. In particular, we thank **WEL Energy Trust** for its foundational investment and long-standing stewardship of the Project; **Trust Waikato** for its consistent leadership in backing evidence-led, community-centred wellbeing work; **MAS Foundation** for its targeted support of our kai research, enabling important lived-experience insights to be brought forward; **FutureProof** for its partnership in advancing practical, place-based housing solutions; and **Waikato Regional Council** for its ongoing support and engagement. We are grateful not only for the financial contributions made, but for the trust, collaboration and shared ambition that sit behind them. Together, these partnerships have strengthened the region's capacity to think differently, act collectively and invest wisely in the long-term wellbeing of Waikato communities.

As we look ahead, the need for shared leadership, credible evidence and courageous conversations has never been greater. The Waikato Wellbeing Project remains committed to playing its part.

Delwyn Abraham
Chair, Transition Leadership Group

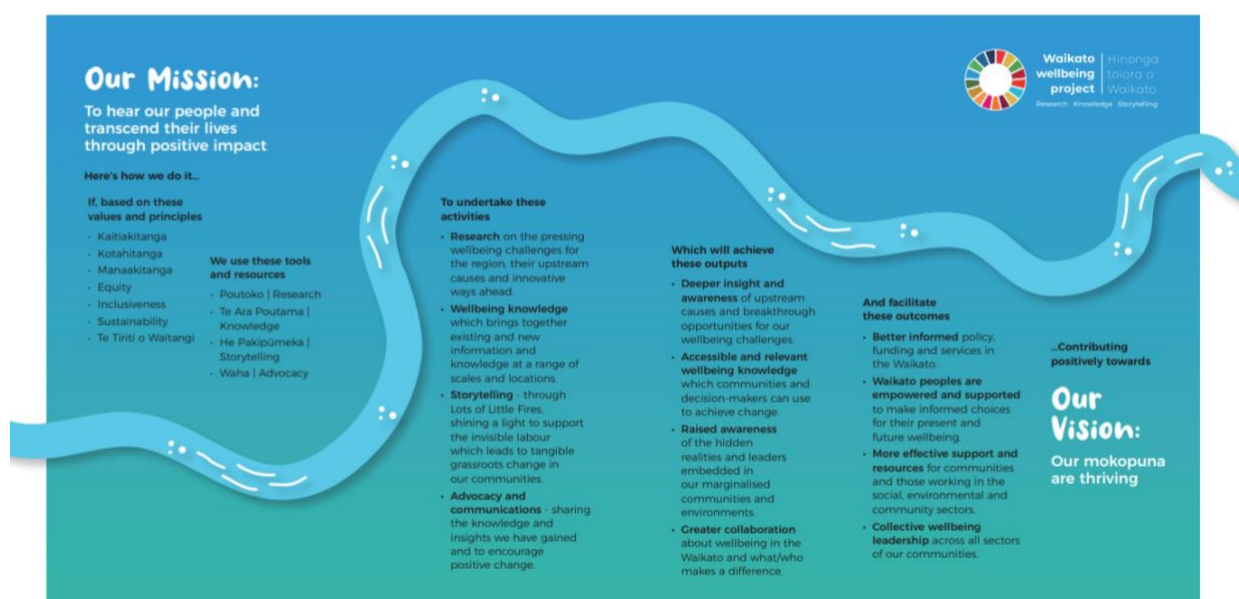
Harvey Brookes
Executive Director

2. Background- Waikato Wellbeing Project | Hinonga Toiora o Waikato

The collective ambition to do something different that would address wicked issues in the Waikato is what drove the WWP's creation and the development of its goals and targets in 2019-20.

The WWP is not mandated to be a policy maker, funder or a service delivery organisation. Its role is to work in the space between grass roots communities and institutional funder/service agencies, accepting uncertainty and complexity, shedding light and sharing insights which will enable us all to move towards greater outcomes. While the WWP was established with a strong focus on wellbeing outcomes/impacts (via the targets), it was always anticipated that these would be achieved collectively, with the WWP acting as a convenor, facilitator and guide, not necessarily the deliverer, funder or "owner." A risk with ambitious targets is that they imply the wellbeing challenges are simple/ tame and can be achieved.

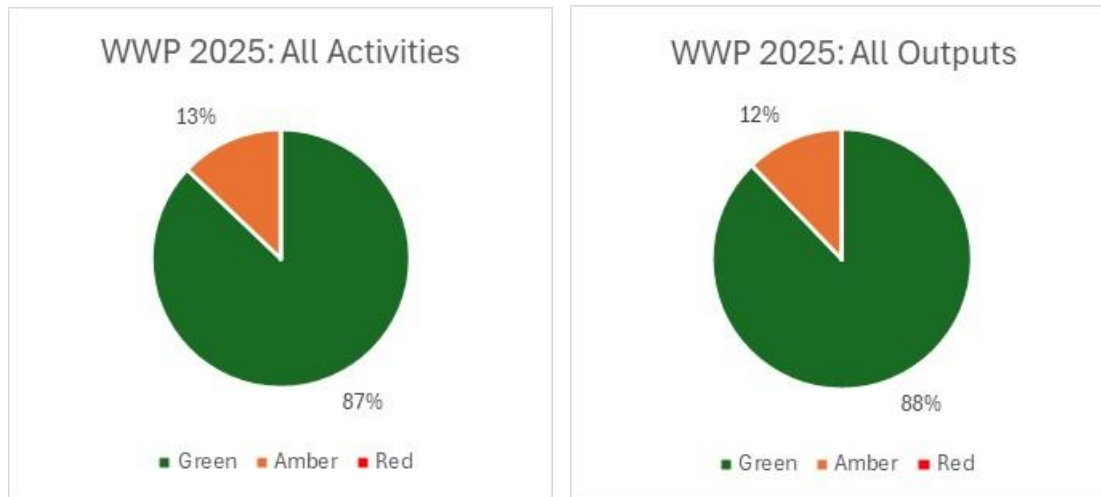
The Theory of Change in the WWP Business Plan (below) is a logic model which describes the chain of results, outcomes and impacts which the WWP creates and contributes towards. Like almost all organisations involved in complex/wicked issues, the achievement of long-term outcomes and impacts is never the result of a single agency or action, but reflects the collective actions of many actors, some of which may help drive towards the goals, and some may confound drive us away/back. Even when there is positive progress towards an outcome, the level of attribution between an action and result is highest for inputs/outputs, and low, even confusing, for outcomes and impacts. People will tend to attribute their actions to "last mile" successes but be more circumspect when issues are complex, or there are setbacks.



3. Progress Summary – Activity and Outputs




The relevant projects and initiatives from the Business Plan are shown below, along with a traffic light indicator of progress against the activities and outputs set out in the plan (**Attachment 1**).

Overall, the WWP is progressing positively and in line with our business plan. Activity performance was steady at **87%** (2025: 88%). Despite significantly greater project complexity this year, output achievement has improved from **81% to 88%**¹. Overall results in 2025 were in line with business plan expectations, and in several key areas exceeded expectations which are described in more detail below². There were no instances of non-delivery (red).



¹ Refer Attachment 2 for a more detailed breakdown

²

Traffic Light guide	
	Green: Either fully completed per plan, on track or only minor slippage. No issues anticipated. Progress > 80%
	Amber: Not fully completed as per plan, some slippage or delay, but still satisfactorily advanced. Progress 50-80%
	Red: Either not commenced or very little likelihood of progress or completion as per plan. Progress < 50%.

4. What About Impacts/Outcomes?

A common question asked of the WWP is “what have you actually done?” As described above, the WWP Theory of Change has set out, within the limits of our operating model, the impacts and outcomes we expect from our work. These are:

- **Better informed** policy, funding and services in the Waikato.
- **Whānau voice** being heard - communities empowered and supported to make decisions about their future.
- **More effective support and resources** for communities and those working in the social, environmental and community sectors.
- **Collective wellbeing leadership** across all sectors of our communities.

All other things being equal, achieving these will positively contribute towards the wellbeing targets and goals the project established in 2020 (and which are explored in our State of the Region report). However, for every goal there are multiple influences and organisations, confounding factors and unknowns. Progress is only likely if a collective leadership³ approach is taken to these challenges. As with any societal scale outcome, there is no simple way to attribute an individual activity to these outcomes. In Section 5, we have commented on how we have contributed towards outcomes/impacts for each project, with reference to our Theory of Change. We do not claim to be the only reason for success and in all cases, as we are working with communities and community leaders, the successes are absolutely theirs and not ours.



³ See https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

5. Performance Highlights *(reported against our strategic framework)*



5.1 Poutoko | Research

Waikato Kai Challenge- this has been the priority research and data/knowledge project for the WWP since 2023. There are 3 components to the challenge:

1. **Lived Experience research**- with a focus on kai opportunities in the Maniapoto and Raukawa rohe. Highlight successful kai motuhake initiatives - identify systemic gaps and set the foundation for long-term solutions.
2. **Stakeholder & Systems Engagement** - facilitate regular hui with key organisations, including iwi/hapū, councils, food networks, and community groups. Strengthen partnerships with existing food security initiatives to align efforts. Engage policymakers to advocate systemic changes in food policy and funding. Integrate findings from food security research into discussions to inform collaborative action.
3. **Policy & Advocacy** - Develop and present policy recommendations based on local food security data and insights. Advocate for sustainable funding models and legislative support for food security initiatives.

What Have We Achieved?

Lived Experience research was commissioned from ThinkPlace in partnership with GoEco and Maniapoto Marae Pact Trust (MMPT). This was facilitated by a MoU between WWP and MMPT and is now completed. Work focused on Te Kuiti and whanau using different strategies to address kai security and kai motuhake. Report has been shared with MMPT as kaitiaki for this work and korero in early 2026 will ensure data sovereignty and that the report is properly stewarded and shared. This work was fully funded by MAS Foundation.

Current efforts are focused on supporting hapori-led river monitoring and building local food growing systems that restore both kai and wai connections. These initiatives strengthen resilience, empower communities, and highlight the importance of hapori-led solutions for long-term wellbeing.

Discussions with Raukawa and South Waikato District Council have started to explore the kai security impacts of recent deindustrialisation in Tokoroa (Oji, Carter Holt Harvey) and any additional work will need to be framed within this context.

Collaboration with marae, hapū, iwi and community continue for the development of regional hubs in both Maniapoto and South Waikato. These hubs are intended to act as central points for local kai initiatives, connecting whānau, hāpori, iwi, local government and other relevant organisations to build and support sustainable practices.

The Kai Challenge Lead has also been working alongside farmer-led catchment groups in the South Waikato as part of Wai Connections and Mountains to Sea Conservation Trust kaupapa. This approach links healthy waterways with sustainable food systems, recognising that kai security and environmental health are inseparable. By bringing together communities, farmers, and local leaders, the project supports practices that protect water quality to ensure access to nutritious kai.

A programme of **Stakeholder & Systems Engagement** was undertaken across 2025 with two phases:

- As part of Matariki ki Waikato, WWP and Go Eco partnered with Te Ohu Whakaita to host four engaging kai wānanga, each aligned with a different star of the Matariki cluster and the unique food systems they represent. These wānanga celebrated mātauranga Māori, stories of kai, and the importance of community connection.
- Regular hui were facilitated with key organisations, including iwi and hapū, councils, food networks, and community groups, beginning with the inaugural Waikato Kai Hui held in partnership with Waikato-Tainui at the Hopuhopu Chambers. The hui brought together kai practitioners from across the region to share knowledge, strengthen relationships, and explore collective approaches to advancing kai motuhake. These gatherings supported ongoing coordination, trust-building, and momentum for more connected regional food system action.
- Key insights from the hui included:
 - **Communities hold the solutions** — whānau and practitioners are ready for coordinated action.
 - Strong call for **simple, Māori-led tools**, practical learning, and regular connection.
 - **Whanaungatanga** was the standout strength — safe, uplifting, and unifying.
 - Clear mandate to build a **regional kai Motuhake network** and an accessible **One-Stop Hub**.
 - Next steps focus on **toolkits, seasonal wānanga**, and a co-designed **Kai Motuhake Pathways Map**.

Overall, the hui marks the beginning of a long-term, community-driven movement centered in mātauranga, identity, and collective strength. Planning is underway to host a larger, two-day regional hui in May 2026 — an opportunity to bring even more whānau, hāpori, practitioners, and partners together to consolidate learning, showcase innovation, and progress the collective strategy emerging from this work.

Policy & Advocacy - In June, Hera and Jo (CE – GoEco) travelled to Te Whanganui-a-Tara to attend *Te Whiringa*, a national hui hosted by Kore Hiakai. The hui brought together changemakers across Aotearoa to explore systems change, food justice, and collective responsibility. Highlights included deep-dive wānanga into systems change, relationship building, and a *Kai & Kōrero* evening featuring speakers such as Angela Clifford (Eat NZ), rangatahi from Porirua Citizens' Assembly, and Helen Robinson (Kai Rawa Trust Chair and Auckland City Missioner). As part of this kaupapa, Go Eco proudly became a formal member of the Kore Hiakai Zero Hunger Collective.

Alongside these events, ongoing conversations, collaborations, and relationship building continue across the Waikato region. We are deepening connections with local iwi, whānau, marae, and community organisations working to strengthen food resilience. At the same time, we're committed to representing the unique experiences and aspirations of our region in national spaces. Our approach continues to weave together research, lived experience, mātauranga Māori, and regional data – ensuring that the voices of our communities are heard, valued, and acted upon in the movement for food sovereignty.

Through the Waikato Kai Challenge and the Waikato Kai Hui, these connections were supported alongside relationships with iwi, marae, community organisations, growers, and regional partners working across kai, wai, and whenua. This collaborative approach has helped contribute to a more coordinated regional food system that supports locally led, values-based responses to food insecurity across Waikato.

Significantly, our kai programme has continued to reinforce kai security as a significant underlying factor which affects the ability of people, whanau and communities to afford good nutritious food.

What impacts has this work had?

The outcomes we seek to contribute towards are described in the business plan below, with some commentary on the progress being made:

- **Better informed policy, funding and services in the Waikato.** Through robust lived-experience research and regional data on food insecurity, WWP has equipped policymakers and funders with ground-level insights that shape more responsive food system policy and advocate for sustained investment in systemic solutions.
- **Waikato peoples are empowered to make informed wellbeing choices** By centring whānau voices, celebrating mātauranga Māori and facilitating wānanga and hui, the project has strengthened community understanding of kai security and supported hapori to lead their own wellbeing pathways with confidence and agency.
- **More effective support and resources for communities and the sector** WWP and GoEco's partnerships with iwi, hapū, marae and community groups — alongside initiatives such as developing regional hubs and practical resources — are enhancing collective capacity and aligning efforts across groups to deliver tangible support where it's most needed.
- **Collective wellbeing leadership across sectors** Regular stakeholder engagement, co-hosted regional hui and involvement in national food justice networks have strengthened cross-sector relationships, positioning WWP as a convener that connects communities, councils, NGOs and policymakers around shared wellbeing goals.



5.2 Te Ara Poutama |Wellbeing Knowledge

The state of wellbeing outcomes in the Waikato is monitored and reported on via our wellbeing knowledge portal [Te Ara Poutama](#). The WWP acts to collect collate, analyse and share data on wellbeing at the regional and sub-regional scale, using the SDGs and WWP targets as a framework. Some data is novel (for example subjective wellbeing data in the Hauraki rohe, or organic waste), other data is existing but has not been localised to the Waikato or is in hard to access formats (for example our research report on kai and food insecurity).

What Have We Achieved?

The priority projects for Te Ara Poutama in 2025 were:

1. Hauraki Opportunity
2. Waikato Housing:
 - a. Affordability Analysis
 - b. Affordability Actions
3. State of the Region Report

These are discussed in more detail below.

5.2.1 Hauraki Opportunity

Funded by Trust Waikato and developed in partnership with the Hauraki Primary Health Organisation Te Tara o Te Whai, Thames Coromandel, Hauraki and Matamata District Councils⁴. The Hauraki Opportunity has been a multi-year project that has brought together organisations at all levels of community, to co-design and apply a wellbeing measurement and management system from the flax roots upwards.

The Hauraki Opportunity:

- was co-constructed with, and applied by and for, the people of Hauraki, including those who work, live, play, or whakapapa to Thames Coromandel, Hauraki or Matamata-Piako districts: from Moehau to Te Aroha, across the Hauraki Plains, and up to the Wharekawa Coast.
- is a repeatable Wellbeing Measurement and Management System that measures what matters most, allowing important choices regarding the present and future wellbeing of the region to be made wisely.
- was developed to respond to challenges identified by community around the lack of data that was granular enough to add value for regional and rural decisionmakers, a challenge familiar to many across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Simply, there was a call for better information about what mattered most to the people living in the area. This report sought to build upon the extensive research and passion of its project partners, namely, project lead Te Tara o te Whai, and project partners Thames-Coromandel, Hauraki and Matamata-Piako District councils, where they saw the value in a robust and scalable iteration of their engagement processes.

Funded by Trust Waikato and the Waikato Wellbeing Project, the Hauraki Opportunity has been facilitated by Huber Social, experts in social impact and community wellbeing to measure the holistic needs and lived experience of the people of Hauraki, to establish a community wellbeing baseline. The results represent more than 205 hours of direct survey input from October 2024 to March 2025, as well as hundreds of conversations, comments, challenges, celebrations, suggestions, and other feedback and input during its co-design and co-construction phases.

[The final report for the Hauraki Opportunity can be viewed here.](#)

The report is intended to clearly express the values, needs, and aspirations of the community, equipping decision-makers and organisations with a deeper understanding of what is influencing and driving their wellbeing to help allocate resources, inform strategy, or make decisions that most effectively improve the wellbeing of the communities they're supporting.

The report presents the findings of the 2024 - 2025 community wellbeing baseline measurement, offering opportunities for effective collaboration, shared learnings, and improved outcomes for the people of Hauraki. Importantly, it enables their voices to be

⁴ These organisations, along with WWP, Māori health providers, iwi and other wellbeing organisations (e.g. Hatō Hone St John) have formed the Te Tara o Te Whai Alliance in the Hauraki Rohe.

heard, highlighting what matters most to them and their wellbeing, and has been designed so that it can be wielded by community to measure wellbeing longitudinally, should they choose to do so.

Key Findings (see infographic overleaf)

- Wellbeing patterns repeat across findings; older adults scored highest, while those with disability or mobility challenges consistently scored lowest.
- Physical health is enduring across all measurement groups as a key area to improve what matters most, but barriers persist in accessing care services.
- While respondents reported high frequencies of happiness, written responses indicated a range of wider issues negatively impacting mental health.
- Māori had the strongest responses to questions around cultural and spiritual connection, but respect around cultural identity scored low across groups.
- Social division in community was reported across a range of issues, with knock-on effects for community connection and feelings of safety.
- Connection to nature was a strength across measurement groups, accompanying calls for more environmental and climate action, as well as more emergency preparedness support.
- Structures and services around housing, accessibility, financial support, and job opportunities were key areas with opportunities to improve what matters most across groups.

What impacts has this work had?

- **Better Informed Policy, Funding and Services in the Waikato** - The Hauraki Opportunity established a locally co-designed wellbeing baseline across the Hauraki rohe, developed with community input and in partnership with district councils. This provides granular, place-based evidence that strengthens local government planning, helps target funding, and informs service design in areas such as health, housing, access and employment.
- **Waikato Peoples Are Empowered to Make Informed Wellbeing Choices** - By clearly articulating what matters most to local people using accessible wellbeing measures grounded in Te Whare Tapa Whā, the project enables individuals, whānau and communities to better understand their wellbeing and priorities. The approach supports informed choices and local ownership of wellbeing outcomes over time.
- **More Effective Support and Resources for Communities and the Sector** - The shared evidence base created through the project supports community organisations and service providers to design more responsive services, strengthen funding bids, and advocate with credible local data. Insights into lived experience and access barriers help align resources more closely with community need.
- **Collective Wellbeing Leadership Across Sectors** - The project fostered cross-sector collaboration between councils, community organisations, iwi and wellbeing partners, embedding shared leadership and accountability for wellbeing outcomes. Its co-design model strengthens collective capability to act on wellbeing priorities across the Hauraki area.



Hauraki Opportunity Wellbeing Baseline

Respondents



Open to all who whakapapa to, live, work, or play in Hauraki, Thames-Coromandel, or Matamata-Piako



Respondent median age was 55 years



88% of respondents reside in the region more than half the year

Measurement Groups

Adults aged 25-54 (n=390)

Older Adults aged 55+ (n=455)

All Respondents (n=878)

Māori (n=149)

Disability and Mobility (n=159)

Overall Wellbeing

(Scale of 1 to 7)



Key Areas to Improve What Matters Most to Wellbeing

Taha Tinana (physical health)

Sleep and feeling well rested

Access to affordable healthy food

Activities that are good for physical and mental health

Taha Hinengaro (mental health)

Sharing thoughts and feelings with others

Impact of wider societal issues on mental health

Taha Wairua (spiritual health)

Opportunity to connect with culture & heritage

Cultural identity recognised by political system

Taha Whānau (family/social health)

Feeling part of a community

Welcoming spaces for children and youth

Additional Factors

Enough appropriate housing options

An accessible community

Accessing financial support services and job opportunities

Areas for Further Investigation and Improvement



1. Targeted support for the disability and mobility group, which scored lowest out of the groups across nearly all factors.



3. Work towards greater social cohesion, trust, and sense of community for positive wellbeing impacts on both individuals and collectives.



2. Increasing accessibility to healthcare, particularly dental care and other care services, by removing the main barriers of cost, distance, and waiting time.



4. Initiatives to protect whenua, community and Aotearoa from environmental, severe weather, and climate impacts.



5. Support specific demographics with the services that matter most to their wellbeing (housing, accessibility, financial support and job opportunities).

5.2.2 Housing Affordability

As mentioned above, the WWP's interest is in finding upstream and root cause explanations for some of our wellbeing challenges and addressing these to create the greatest leverage for change. While housing has been an acknowledged issue in the Waikato (and New Zealand) for some time, the issue has mainly been framed in terms of the availability and affordability of shelter and homes.

The WWP is a member of the Waikato Housing Initiative and has already contributed significantly by funding the Waikato housing dashboard/data lake⁵ and the 2023 update of the housing stocktake⁶. However, feedback from the community and stakeholders was that insufficient attention was being paid to affordability and that there were few, if any, innovative solutions being proposed for the Waikato.

What Have We Achieved?

In 2025 we commissioned and completed two major pieces of work:

a) Waikato Housing- Affordability Analysis (with Waikato Housing Initiative and FutureProof)

This project dove more deeply into affordability, exploring trends over time and reverse-engineered the consequences of unaffordable housing for people trying to own a home. A full report was published “Hiding in Plain Sight: the Real Cost of Housing in Waikato.”

The research found that Waikato's housing market is increasingly excluding working families, with housing costs far outpacing income growth and rents consuming a disproportionate share of earnings. Work which the WWP has undertaken outlines the structural challenges and proposes equity-driven, place-based policy responses supported by regional data.

Key regional indicators—such as the median house price of \$740,000 and a regional median household gross income of \$116,722—reveal a price-to-income ratio of approximately 6.4:1, signalling a deepening affordability crisis across the Waikato region. These structural imbalances entrench long-term financial stress, limit pathways to home ownership, and reflect a systemic decoupling of housing costs from local income realities.

The figure below visualises the growing affordability gap in Waikato's housing market over the past three decades. It compares the median house price (in red) with the median household income (in black), alongside two internationally recognised affordability thresholds based on multiples of income.

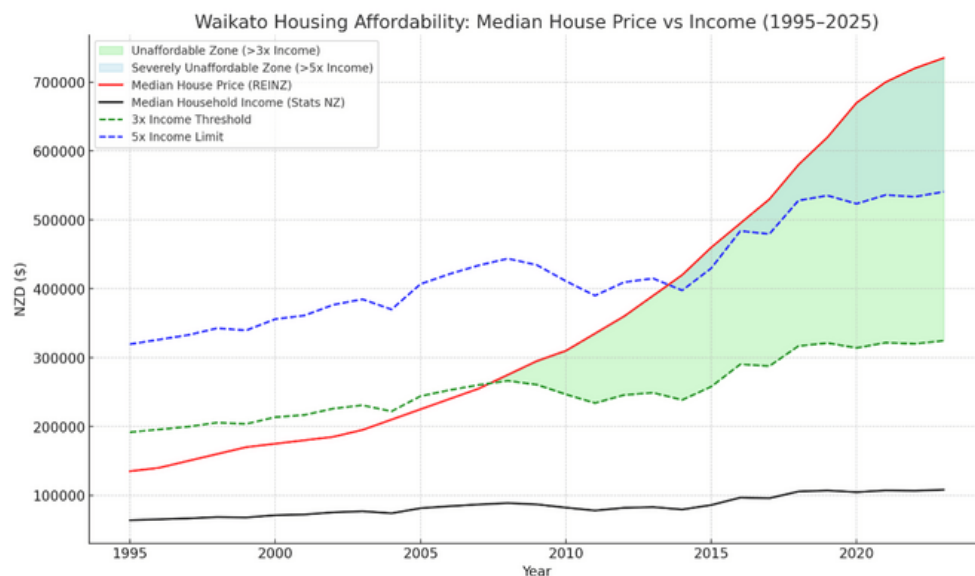
In 1995, median house prices were approximately three times the income, consistent with a healthy market. However, from around 2003 onwards, house prices began outpacing income growth, breaking past affordability thresholds. By 2025, the gap between income and house prices has widened dramatically, with prices exceeding 6 times the median household income, making most homes unaffordable for average earners.

If house prices continue to grow faster than incomes, the time required to save a deposit will stretch from 13 years today to 21 years by 2035 and 28 years by 2045. Without intervention, housing will continue to drift further out of reach for many, entrenching long-term inequality and financial stress. The analysis confirms that Waikato's housing system—already unaffordable for many—is structurally exclusionary, shaped by income disparities, geography, and policy design gaps.

⁵ [Housing Data Lake | Waikato Housing Initiative](#)

⁶ [Stocktake FINAL](#)

The results of this work were shared in a full report on our website and social media channels⁷ and via a public webinar in October⁸. The WWP's work also featured in an episode of the Deep Dive Series on housing by Community Housing Aotearoa⁹.



b) Waikato Housing- Affordability Actions

The next phase of this work has now commenced, in partnership with Veros Limited, co-funded by Trust Waikato and FutureProof. The purpose of this work is to identify and help advance real world solutions on what it would take to improve housing affordability in the Waikato region, addressing the issues identified in the above report. There are many different elements to affordable housing including:

- Where in the continuum housing is required (from homelessness to home ownership)
- Which levers are available and are being deployed- such as land, finance and policy, to name just a few
- What other actors in the system are doing- for example the government's Going for Housing Growth Programme, community housing providers, iwi and private developers, funders and philanthropists
- Whether a supply, demand-driven or mixed approach is taken
- Whether actions aim to stabilise the market price of houses, or lower barriers to entry (e.g. rent to own, shared equity etc).

This work does not aim to 'boil the ocean', but rather to develop a practical, data-driven Investment model that identifies commercially feasible pathways for delivering affordable rental and ownership housing to middle-income households (earning \$60,000–\$150,000 annually) in the Waikato region. While the work will not be completed until March 2026, the preliminary conclusions reached so far are:

- **Delivering Affordable Homes is like 'Death by a Thousand Cuts':** The development process is long, uncertain, costly and risky. **Action required:** Simplify the regulatory process.

⁷ [WaikatoHousingAffordabilityCompleteBriefingV8.pdf](#)

⁸ [\(1326\) Waikato Wellbeing Project: Hiding in Plain Sight: The Real Cost of Housing in Waikato - YouTube](#)

⁹ [\(1326\) DeepDive - Harvey Brookes Waikato Wellbeing Project - YouTube](#)

- **Affordability Means Building Smaller, Smarter Homes:** A mix of typologies is needed, including granny flats, duplexes, townhouses, apartments, multi-generational homes and retirement villages. This will better meet the needs of everyone, particularly as our ageing population occupies larger homes that families need. **Action required:** Make it easy to build smaller.
- **Buyer Mindset + Market Demand Matter:** In delivering affordability in face of rising house prices new builds become a powerful tool. On the demand side, most lenders require only a 10% deposit for new homes compared to 20% for existing properties. That's half the time to save, and this speed can make the difference between getting on the ladder or missing out entirely, as house prices historically rise faster than incomes.

On the supply side, new smaller homes add much needed stock to help stabilise prices. But people need to want new homes and importantly understand how to buy them. Financial literacy and confidence in off-the-plan purchases will create the real demand developers need from lenders to deliver smaller, more affordable homes. **Action required:** Shift mindsets and create demand for smaller new builds.

Veros are currently finalising a set of 6 actions which will contribute towards the above priority areas will be presented to WHI Trustees and FutureProof in March 2026 for consideration and action.

What impacts has this work had?

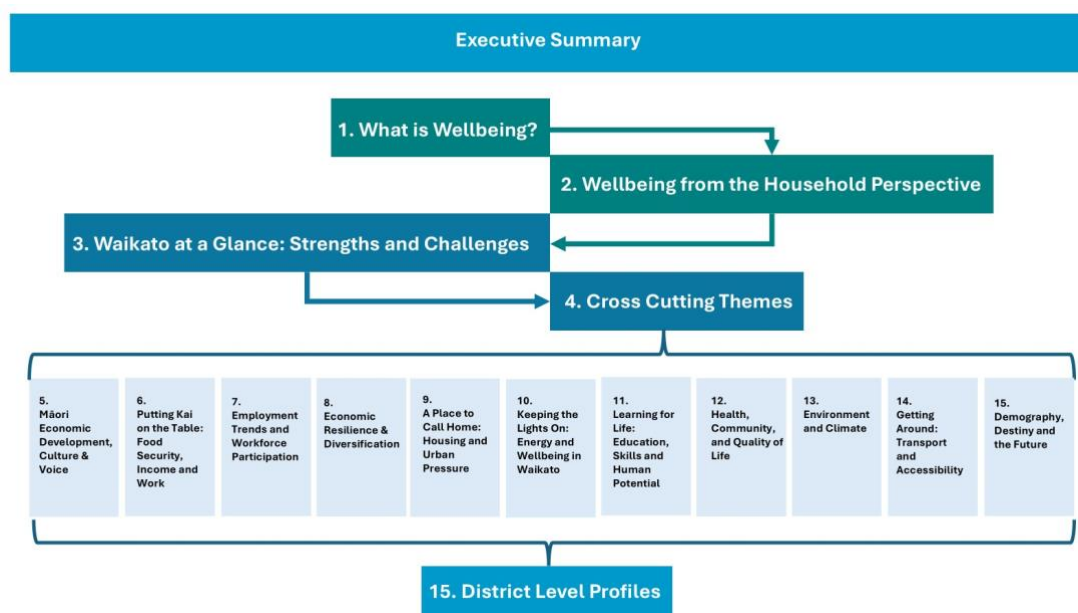
- **Better informed policy, funding and services in the Waikato:** In 2025, WWP strengthened regional housing decision-making by producing accessible, wellbeing-focused evidence on housing affordability and housing stress. This work reframed housing as a core determinant of wellbeing, supporting more informed policy discussions, priority-setting and cross-agency alignment among local government, housing partners and community organisations.
- **Waikato peoples are empowered to make informed wellbeing choices:** By translating complex housing data into clear, publicly accessible insights, WWP enabled whānau, communities and local leaders to better understand housing pressures and their implications for present and future wellbeing. This supported more confident community engagement in housing conversations and solutions.
- **More effective support and resources for communities and the sector:** WWP's housing analysis provided a shared evidence base for community housing providers, social service organisations and advocacy groups. While not delivering services directly, WWP's work supported more coordinated planning, strengthened advocacy for resourcing, and improved alignment between community need and system responses.
- **Collective wellbeing leadership across sectors:** WWP's 2025 housing work positioned housing as a shared regional wellbeing issue, fostering collaboration across iwi, government, community and research partners. By convening evidence, lived experience and dialogue, WWP contributed to stronger collective leadership focused on long-term, equitable housing outcomes for the Waikato.

5.2.3 State of the Region Report

An important role of the WWP has been to provide an overview on progress the region is making towards greater wellbeing. This is an important component of our theory of change- as the State of the Region Report provides data and information to assess the long-term impacts of the work of all these involved in wellbeing in the Waikato region (including the WWP), and whether our vision is being advanced towards.

In the past we have tracked progress against our original wellbeing targets- for example our [2023 Progress Update](#), as well as providing more specific data and information on wellbeing in relation to areas such as [rangatahi wellbeing](#), [food security](#), [housing](#), the [wellbeing of young women](#), and the wellbeing of people in the [Hauraki rohe](#).

Our [2025 draft State of the Region Report](#) aims to provide a snapshot of wellbeing in the Waikato. The overarching structure of the report is shown below. As well as providing commentary on what we mean by wellbeing, the report also provides a summary of the region's strengths and challenges, and some of the cross-cutting themes that appear to run through all topics and areas. The development of this report was funded by Trust Waikato.



The report has been constructed to look at wellbeing from the household | whānau perspective. This means it explores issues which tend to be most relevant to people's daily lived experiences, and which are also most mentioned by people when asked to rate their own subjective wellbeing. Areas not mentioned in this report are not unimportant for wellbeing, and are addressed in greater detail in other reports such as [Waikato Regional Councils Waikato Progress Indicators \(WPI\)](#). Eleven thematic areas have been selected and are reviewed in the report.

The cross-cutting themes which are highlighted in the report are:

1. **Income Adequacy and Household Financial Stress:** Income growth has not kept pace with rising living costs across the region. Increases in housing, transport, food, and energy expenses have outstripped wage growth for more than a decade, eroding disposable income and straining household budgets. This creates a cascade of wellbeing impacts.

2. **Housing → Food Insecurity → Health → Education → Economic Wellbeing: A Causal Chain:** Housing is a foundational determinant of wellbeing, shaping multiple downstream outcomes that accumulate across the life course. When housing is unaffordable, unstable, overcrowded, or of poor quality, it creates a cascade of pressures that affect food security, health, education and long-term economic participation.
3. **Vulnerability to Extreme Weather → Energy Insecurity → Household Vulnerability**
4. Extreme weather events—heavy rainfall, flooding, heatwaves, and cold snaps—expose vulnerabilities in household energy systems and incomes. This vulnerability is a combination of changes in event frequency and intensity, and greater levels of community exposure. Households with limited financial reserves, poor-quality housing, or inefficient appliances are disproportionately affected.
5. **Structural Inequities for Māori, Pasifika, Aged and Disabled People.** Many wellbeing disparities in the Waikato are rooted in long-standing structural inequities. For Māori, historic land loss, disrupted social structures, and inequitable service systems continue to shape contemporary outcomes. For Pasifika communities, lower incomes, larger household sizes, and limited access to services outside major centres amplify vulnerability. Aged and disabled people face persistent barriers across every wellbeing domain, from transport and housing to digital inclusion and employment.
6. **Transport Inaccessibility Reinforcing Housing Displacement.** The geography of the Waikato means that transport and housing pressures are deeply intertwined. As housing costs rise in Hamilton and nearby centres, lower-income households are pushed further outward into districts with cheaper rents or home-ownership opportunities.



5.3 Lots of Little Fires

The award-winning storytelling programme Lots of Little Fires (LOLF) completed its third season in 2025 with another 5 more in-depth video stories captured and shared¹⁰. Lots of Little Fires is a strengths-based storytelling and insight mechanism that intentionally elevates community-defined solutions and lived experience into regional wellbeing discourse and decision-making. This aligns squarely with WWP’s mission to “hear our people and transcend their future through positive impact” and to bridge lived experience with policy and service structures.

The portfolio of stories — from Taurikura and The Serve to Ending and Alleviating Homelessness in Kirikiriroa — illustrates that persistent, locally led interventions often outperform or fill gaps in mainstream service responses, particularly where conventional policy and funding fail to account for cultural context, relational trust, or the complexity of systemic disadvantage.

The stories have not only been produced and shared widely on website and social media platforms, but they have also been used as important storytelling tools to aggregate support and resources for the people and organisations profiled. Stories captured and shared in 2025:

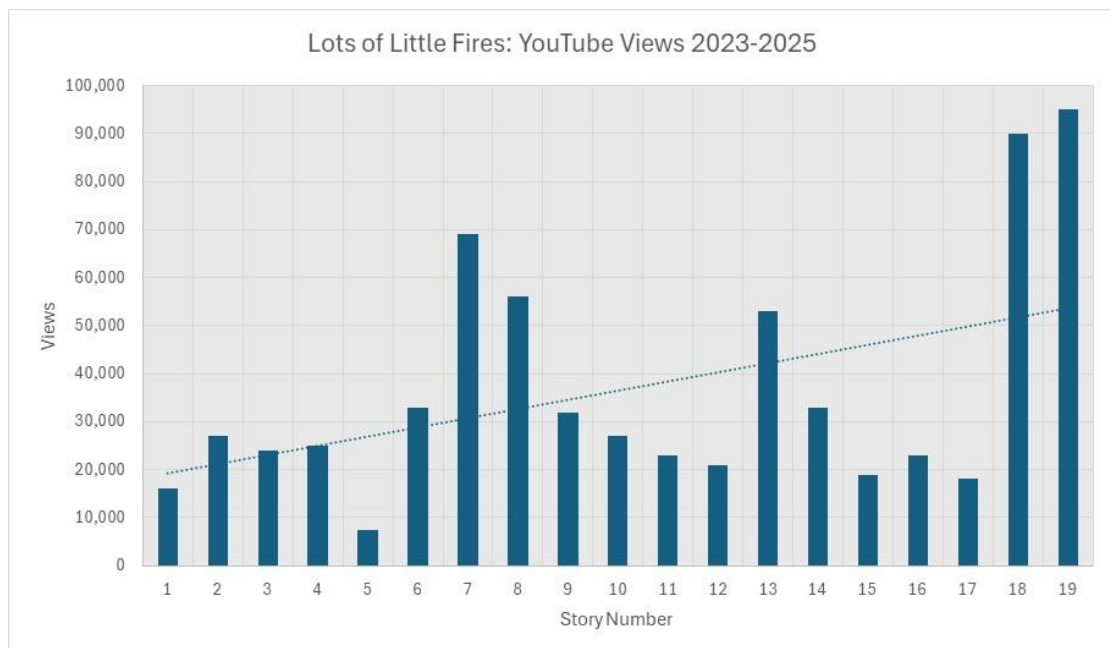
- [Taurikura: A Vision for Thriving Together](#)
- [The Serve | Feeding Hearts, Not Just Bellies – 365 Days a Year in Hamilton.](#)
- [From Bluff to Cape, from Survivor to Advocate.](#)
- [Te Kura Taiao o Te Nehenehenui: Not All Classrooms Are Made of Four Walls.](#)
- [Ending and Alleviating Homelessness in Kirikiriroa](#)

¹⁰ [Waikato Wellbeing Project celebrates one year of Lots of Little Fires - sharing inspiring stories and positive impact | Waikato Wellbeing Project](#)



What Have We Achieved?

As of January 2025, the 19 LOLF stories and one summary video have been viewed **700,000 times** on YouTube, along with strong viewership levels on the WWP website, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. As the programme has developed and impacts increased, viewership has also grown.



Throughout the 2023–25 LOLF series, several policy-relevant patterns emerge:

- **Community-led practice as evidence of effectiveness:** Stories such as The Serve and homelessness supports show how unconditional, dignified services reduce barriers to engagement and link into broader support systems — a clear signal that policy frameworks need to fund relational, low-threshold service delivery rather than episodic crisis responses.

- **Cultural and contextual legitimacy:** Taurikura and Te Kura Taiao o Te Nehenehenui demonstrate that embedding Te Ao Māori perspectives in education and civic engagement produces culturally congruent outcomes that conventional service models overlook. Policy must recognise and resource these forms of knowledge and leadership equivalently to mainstream provision.
- **Systemic advocacy from lived experience:** Sam Troth’s journey and similar narratives show how lived experience can inform prevention and justice policy more effectively than abstract reporting; yet this requires mechanisms within governance structures to elevate such voices into policy-setting forums.

For service and funding systems, LOLF highlights a critical gap: investment tends to favour outputs and compliance metrics rather than relational impact and narrative legitimacy. These videos consistently reveal the invisible labour community practitioners perform — labour that delivers long-term wellbeing outcomes but is poorly resourced under current funding logics. The regional review of WWP’s deliverables found that storytelling was among its most effective outputs, yet mainstream funding structures do not recognise narrative impact as a valid evidence base for resourcing decisions.

Policy & Funding Implications

From this evaluation, the following high-level implications emerge:

- **Funding frameworks should honour relational and narrative evidence as complementary to quantitative metrics.** LOLF demonstrates that lived experience stories can prompt systems shifts and unlock local investment, yet current funding models do not consistently treat narrative impact as a funding criterion.
- **Policy architecture must systematically integrate community voice at the design and evaluation stages.** This means co-design mechanisms that go beyond consultation — embedding community storytellers and practitioners as partners in policy advisory bodies, reflective of WWP’s approach and strategic intent.
- **Service models should be resourced for relational depth and continuity rather than short, transactional interventions.** The effectiveness of initiatives featured in LOLF suggests that upstream, sustained engagement yields better wellbeing outcomes; funding contracts should shift accordingly.
- **Regional wellbeing strategies should adopt storytelling outputs as part of evidence infrastructure.** Given WWP’s Theory of Change and the documented positive policy engagements arising from LOLF, regional planning and reporting structures should accommodate narrative evidence to inform target setting and accountability frameworks.

What impacts has this work had?

- **Better Informed Policy, Funding, and Services:** While systemic change is inherently long-term, LOLF has been used as an evidence tool in policy and service dialogues and has contributed to informed thinking around transitional housing, youth services and community-led solutions. WWP reporting indicates that these narratives have reached decision-makers and influenced how ideas are framed within policy spaces.

- **Empowerment of Waikato People to Make Informed Choices:** The stories have helped people in the region see themselves, their struggles and their agency reflected in the media, providing not just representation but models for action and resilience. This sense of connection and possibility is a form of empowerment that strengthens individual and collective capacity to pursue wellbeing choices.
- **More Effective Support for Social, Environmental & Community Sectors:** By documenting what works on the ground and elevating the voices of community practitioners, LOLF has contributed to broader sector awareness and support. It has helped shape conversations about workforce challenges (e.g., youth worker resourcing) and the systemic conditions that affect sector effectiveness, providing a qualitative evidence base that complements quantitative sector reporting.
- **Collective Wellbeing Leadership Across the Community:** LOLF has helped develop and celebrate leadership distributed widely across the Waikato, recognising leaders from diverse cultural, professional and lived-experience backgrounds. Its influence has helped expand what leadership is seen as — beyond formal roles to include community stewards, activists and grassroots innovators — reinforcing collective responsibility for wellbeing.

Next Step for Lots of Little Fires

Lots of Little Fires is a relatively resource intensive initiative and the WWP's ability to fully self-fund has always been limited. In early 2025, we commenced a process to explore new operating and funding models for LOLF which would allow it to further reach its potential, support wellbeing leaders and communities, and be financially independent.

As a result of this work, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed with Seed Waikato, for LOLF to transfer at the end of 2025. The key attributes of the agreement are:

- In light of the Kaupapa, community funding and ownership of WWP, Seed Waikato and Lots of Little Fires, LOLF is transferred to Seed Waikato at no cost.
- WWP will be acknowledged in all future content as the original creator of LOLF and will be able to report all new stories and LOLF activity
- Seed Waikato, Len Reynolds and Creative Waikato will convene a Kaitiaki Ropu and a values/editorial charter to guide LOLF and will update WWP on progress 6-monthly.
- From January 2026, Seed Waikato will assume all operational, funding and employment/contracting responsibilities for LOLF
- Seed Waikato will develop a 5-year plan for LOLF including a future funding strategy.

The WWP is honoured to have been able to commission and lead the first three years of Lots of Little Fires. In this time, it has created and championed a different way of achieving outcomes which fully complements a more traditional research and policy-based approach. The stories shared and amplified by LOLF strongly align with our priority areas of youth wellbeing, housing, food and employability. We thank Joe Wilson and Muredach Daly for their creativity, energy and passion and also acknowledge the leadership of Seed Waikato, Len Reynolds and Creative Waikato in ensuring this significant programme can be sustained.



5.4 Waha | Advocacy

Our advocacy programme has several elements:

- General communications via our own website and social media channels
- Lots of Little Fires and the follow up which we undertake once the story is published
- Direct advocacy with elected representatives and officials
- Formal advocacy via submissions

What Have we Achieved?

- Published 40 wellbeing updates and stories on our website and via 5 direct mail newsletters reaching cumulatively over 5,000 stakeholders. Our newsletter had a very high open rate of 63% (benchmark is 19.4%)
- The WWP LinkedIn page has 1,137 followers, and Harvey's page has 1,751 - indications of the strong base of advocates and supporters for the WWP
- Engagement rates for WWP channels are 13.5%, which is more than 400% above non-profit sector benchmarks for Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn of 3.06%¹¹
- Published an introductory video for incoming elected members and community stakeholders on the WWP
- Formal submissions, presentations, membership and other engagements have included:
 1. Submissions/advocacy statements on local and central government and philanthropic agency plans and policies including:
 - a. Hamilton City Council 3-waters CCO proposal
 - b. Waikato District Council 3-waters proposal
 - c. Submission to Local Government (Systems Improvement) Amendment Bill
 - d. Advocacy on the proposal to disestablish Māori Wards
 - e. Submission on Treaty Principles Bill
 - f. Co-created with Sport Waikato, Creative Waikato, Waikato Housing Initiative and Community Waikato an introductory video for incoming councillors, Mayors and Chairs.
 2. Gave evidence to Hamilton City Council and Waikato District Council on infrastructure, housing affordability and food security¹²
 3. Submission to WEL Energy Trust Annual Plan
 4. Facilitated webinars, videos and hui on:
 - a. Hauraki Opportunity (2)
 - b. Wellbeing of young woman
 - c. Housing affordability.
 5. Signed Memorandum of Understanding with Maniapoto Marae Pact Trust
 6. Presented to the Economic Development New Zealand annual conference on the WWP and member of EDNZ Annual Awards judging panel
 7. Presented to the Community Waikato AGM on the WWP
 8. Presented to the Trust Waikato Trustees' strategic planning workshop on the WWP
 9. Presented to Perth (Australia) Social Wellbeing agency leaders meeting with Huber Social on the WWP and the Hauraki Opportunity
 10. Wrote to Minister Willis and the CEO of the Social Investment Agency regarding the WWP reports on food security. Replies received.

¹¹ [Average engagement rates for 12 industries \[January 2025\]](#)

¹² [Waters CCO debate bubbles on despite majority submitter support | Waikato Times](#)

11. Co-convened and facilitated the Waikato Social Investment Summit with Trust Waikato, Waikato Tainui and Social Investment Agency.
12. Two articles published in the Waikato Times- on Kai/food¹³ and housing affordability¹⁴
13. Partnered with Waikato University School of Business to support graduate business student community wellbeing projects
14. Co-convened Waikato Kai Motuhake hui with Waikato Tainui at Hopuhopu
15. Convened 4 hui across the Waikato as part of the kai challenge and Matariki events
16. Co-funded with Len Reynolds Trust a group of youth leaders to travel to Otautahi to engage with their youth sector leaders.
17. Presented to senior teaching staff at Rototuna High Schools and facilitated further engagement regarding Lots of Little Fires
18. Membership of:
 - a. Waikato Housing Initiative Leadership Group
 - b. Aotearoa SDG Alliance
 - c. Waitomo Housing Action Group
 - d. Te Tara o Te Whai Alliance leadership Team



¹³ [Hungry kids in an agricultural powerhouse | Waikato Times](#)

¹⁴ [Housing affordability is slipping through our fingers | Waikato Times](#)

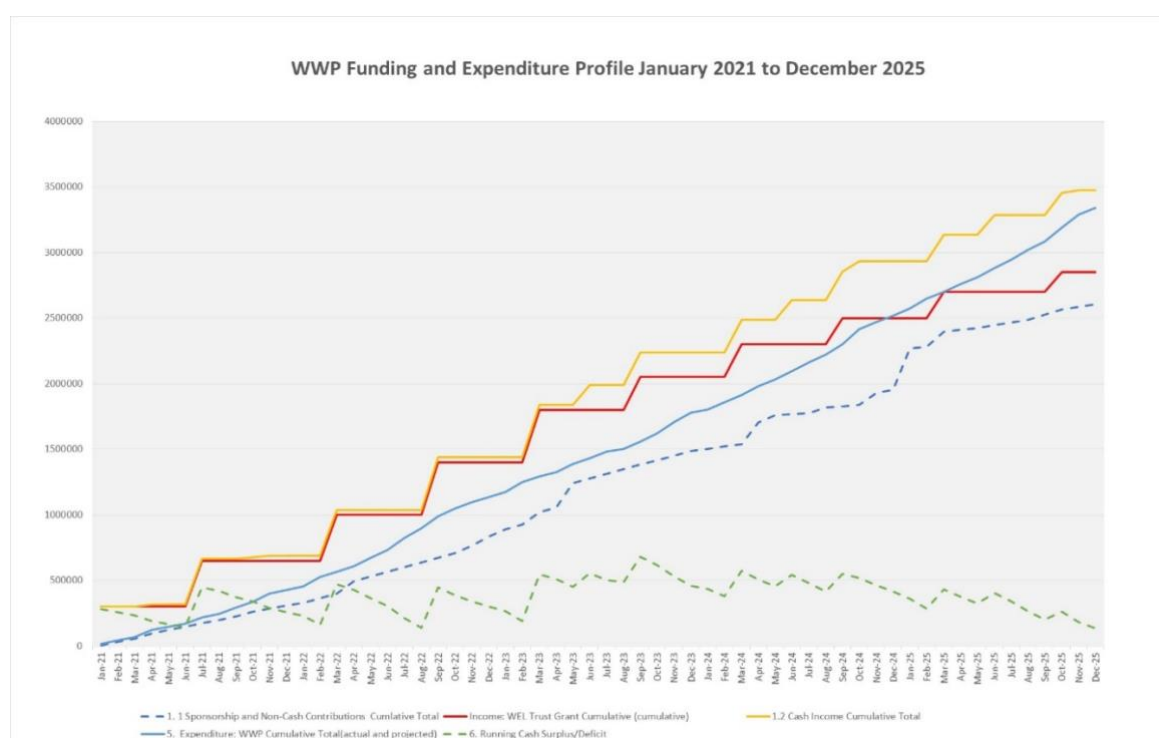
6. Budget Analysis

The project continues to progress on track and within the funding profile provided by WEL Energy Trust, WRC and Trust Waikato. Total expenditure at 31 January 2025 is **\$3,359,303**, giving a 12-month expenditure for 2025 of **\$780,024**. This is above the 5-year average of \$668,000 due to additional project funding (MAS funding for kai research and FutureProof for housing) and the onboarding of additional resources in Te Ara Poutama.

Projections based on the Business Plan indicate that providing current funders meet their agreed commitments the WWP will continue until **November 2026**.

To date we have secured **\$2.62m** of cash and in-kind funding for the WWP since 2021, **131%** of the target in the Partnership and Funding Agreement (\$2m in cash and/or in kind). Assuming a similar profile of additional funding as per the past 4 years, this would result in in-kind and cash co-funding reaching **\$3.06m** by November 2026, which would be **151%** of target in the Partnership and Funding Agreement.

In addition to the WEL Energy Trust, our largest cash co-funder has been Trust Waikato (\$450,000 over 3 years). We have also approached a range of other regional and national funders and enquired about co-funding. A key development in late 2024 was securing an additional \$80,000 in funding for our kai research from the MAS Foundation¹⁵. This fully funded the lived experience research undertaken by ThinkPlace Limited in the Maniapoto rohe. Our partnership with GoEco also means they will make a net in-kind contribution of \$127,000 towards the Kai Challenge over the next 6 months.



¹⁵ [Improving health and wellbeing equity in Aotearoa - MAS Foundation](#)

7. WWP Next Steps

In April 2025, the WWP Kaiitiaki Advisory Board's term ended. At the same time, discussions commenced with funders and stakeholders about the next steps for the WWP, following on from the independent review, and given the finite resources currently available to the project.

A Transition Leadership Group (TLG) was established to guide and oversee decisions on the next steps for the project. A sub-group of the Kaiitiaki, the TLG members were:

- Delwyn Abraham (Chair)
- Mike Rolton
- Don Scalet
- Marcel Manders (representing WEL Energy Trust)
- Karen Bennett (representing Waikato Regional Council)

A Terms of Reference was developed which defined the role of the TLG as to *"provide leadership, guidance and advice regarding the next stage of the WWP, while also providing advice and support for the WWP's programme of actions, as set out in the 2025-26 Business Plan."*

The Terms of Reference also identified 4 broad (non-exclusive) options for the TLG to evaluate and reach a conclusion on:

- a) No or minor change
- b) Different structure, funding, operating, procurement, partnership and personnel models. This could apply to the entire project or its constituent parts.
- c) Partnerships and/or mergers with other existing organisations and entities.
- d) An orderly wind-up and cessation of the project as funding expires.

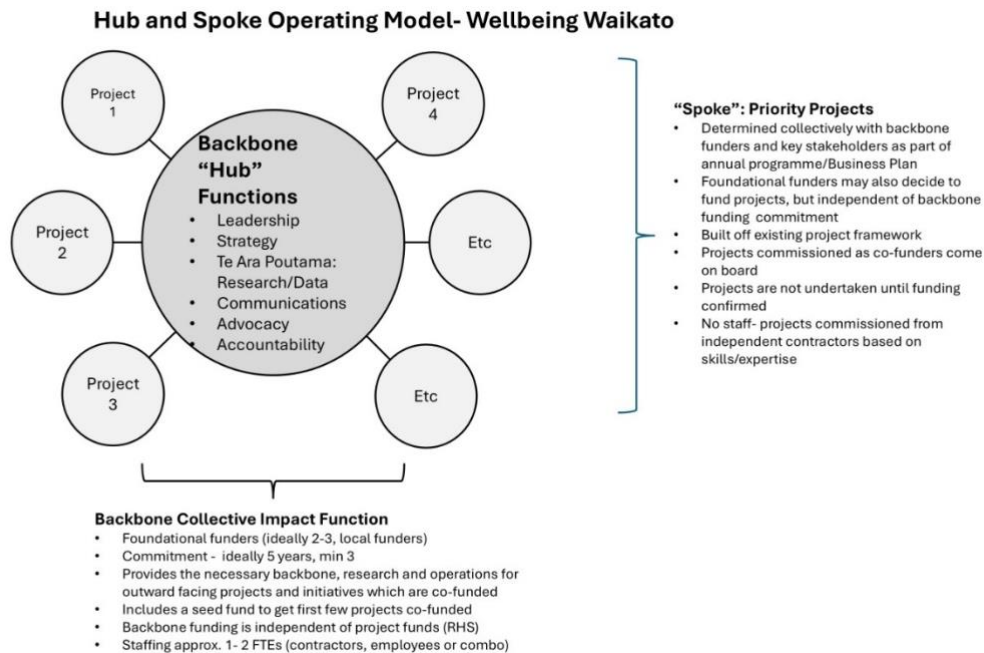
Across the second half of 2025, the TLG engaged with stakeholders to hear which option(s) they preferred, and how each might be practically implemented.

The overwhelming majority of people interviewed expressed a strong level of support for the project, both in terms of the positive value and impact it has had so far, the need for it to continue and the opportunities for it to evolve and adapt so that it can both increase its value add and real-world impact. Most interviewees saw opportunities to further improve our operating model and delivery processes, with a clear focus on real-world grass roots impacts being connected to wider systems change. Key points noted include:

- **WWP is valued and needed** – it fills a gap no other organisation is addressing at a regional level.
- **Keep the focus** on research, knowledge sharing, and storytelling – but ensure this leads to collective action.
- **Move towards legal independence** to strengthen funding opportunities and perceived neutrality.
- **Continue to champion resilience and systems change** in the Waikato, even in a challenging political environment.
- **Enhance engagement with funders and partners**, including local government and iwi, to build ownership and resource support.

- **Protect and grow signature programmes** like Lots of Little Fires, which deliver tangible community benefits.
- **Use influence strategically** – be prepared to challenge and provoke where necessary to advance wellbeing outcomes.

A hub and spoke model (see diagram) was developed to ensure that the core functions of the WWP can continue (such as leadership, strategy, communications, research, data). Subject or place-specific initiatives/projects would be commissioned as funding and partners becomes available.



At its 3 November meeting, the TLG agreed:


1. All practicable steps should be taken to continue WWP as an indefinite part of the region's wellbeing leadership ecosystem, so long as funding permits.
2. To establish an independent Charitable Trust- notionally called the Wellbeing Waikato Charitable Trust, TA "Wellbeing Waikato | Toiora o Waikato", to become operational before mid-2026.
3. Lots of Little Fires be transferred to a consortium of Len Reynolds Trust, SEED Waikato and Community Waikato, at nil cost, including IP. A MoU/partnership agreement will set out the terms of the transfer.


Work is now underway to secure funding for the backbone/hub function as above. A request for part funding of the backbone function has been considered by the WEL Energy Trust. On 25 November the Trust considered a proposal and resolved to:

1. Acknowledge the proposal from the Waikato Wellbeing Project and the 'hub and spoke' model proposed.
2. Not fund the hub function, while still being open to funding proposals through the normal grant process.

Work is currently ongoing to secure new funding sources for the project.

Attachment 1. Business Plan Activities and Outputs


Resources	Activities to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment	Outputs to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
<p>Pootoko Research</p> 	<p>Waikato Kai Challenge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lived Experience research, with a focus on kai opportunities in the Maniapoto and Raukawa rohe. 		<p>Lived Experience research commissioned from ThinkPlace in partnership with goEco and Maniapoto Marae Pact Trust (MMPT) facilitated by MoU, and now completed. Fully funded by MAS Foundation. Work focused on Te Kūiti and Whānau using different strategies to address kai security and kai Motuhake. Report has been shared with MMPT as kaitiaki for this work, and korero in early 2026 will ensure data sovereignty and that the report is properly stewarded and shared. Engagement with Raukawa commenced in late 2025 and will be further advanced in early 2026.</p>	<p>Insight and Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Final ThinkPlace Lived Experience report and infographic - Maniapoto by August 2025 - Raukawa by December 2025 		<p>The Lived Experience research with ThinkPlace was progressed through a focused partnership with Ngāi Maniapoto Marae PACT Trust, culminating in Working towards Kai Motuhake in Te Takawā o Watomo, an inspiration booklet grounded in local lived experience. A planned Raukawa output was paused to explore alternative, Kaupapa-aligned approaches that remain responsive to local context and relationships.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight successful kai Motuhake initiatives, identify systemic gaps, and set the foundation for long-term solutions. 		<p>Strong connections were formed with organisations and initiatives addressing systemic gaps, supporting clearer identification of barriers and opportunities for alignment. This work contributed to the early establishment of regional hub approaches in South Waikato (Tokoroa) and Waitomo (Te Kūiti), laying foundations for longer-term, locally-led solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progress reports to MAS Foundation 		<p>MAS Foundation regularly updated on progress and final reports sent in January 2026.</p>
	<p>Stakeholder & Systems Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate regular hui with key organisations, including iwi/hapū, councils, food networks, and community groups. 		<p>Regular hui were facilitated with key organisations, including iwi and hapū, councils, food networks, and community groups, beginning with the inaugural Waikato Kai Hui held in partnership with Waikato-Tainui at the Hōpūhōpu Chambers. The hui brought together kai practitioners from across the region to share knowledge, strengthen relationships, and explore collective approaches to advancing kai Motuhake. These gatherings supported ongoing coordination, trust building, and momentum for more connected regional food system action.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder Engagement Reports & Action Plans - Documentation of collaboration efforts and strategic plans. 		<p>All engagements with community groups, iwi and stakeholders documented and shared on-line on WWP website and social media platforms. Lived Experience report for Maniapoto shared with MMPT. Summary reports and plans in progress.</p>
	<p>Strengthen partnerships with existing food security initiatives to align efforts.</p>		<p>Mahi focused on strengthening and aligning relationships with existing food security initiatives including Kore Hakaia, Auckland City Mission, The S.O.C. Eat NZ, Food Rescue NZ, and Para Kore Marae Inc., to reduce duplication and strengthen collective impact. Through the Waikato Kai Challenge and the Waikato Kai Hui, these connections were supported alongside relationships with iwi, marae, community organisations, growers, and regional partners working across kai, wai, and whenua. This collaborative approach has helped contribute to a more coordinated regional food system that supports locally-led, values-based responses to food insecurity across Waikato.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy Briefs & Recommendations - Evidence-based proposals to inform government and funders. 		<p>Policy briefs and recommendations were developed to provide evidence-based proposals to government agencies and funders. This included contributing submissions on a range of proposed bills, informed by local food security data, research, and community-led insights. These contributions supported policy and funding discussions by grounding them in Kaupapa Māori perspectives and real-world experience from the Waikato.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage policymakers to advocate systemic changes in food policy and funding. 		<p>Engaged with policymakers and system leaders to advocate for more coordinated, equitable, and locally responsive approaches to food policy and funding. This included attendance and participation in a range of conferences, sector gatherings, and hui that brought together food policymakers, funders, and community practitioners, enabling Kaupapa Māori and community-led perspectives to be shared. These engagements helped strengthen understanding of the systemic changes needed to better support regional, values-based food systems in Waikato.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consolidated Research Report - An integrated summary of key research findings with recommendations for systemic change. 		<p>In progress</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate findings from food security research into discussions to inform collaborative action 		<p>Regular hui were facilitated with key organisations including iwi and hapū, local councils, food networks, and community groups to strengthen alignment and shared understanding. These hui created space for relationship-building, knowledge exchange, and practical coordination across Kaupapa, priorities, and resourcing. This ongoing engagement supported more connected and collaborative approaches to advancing food security and locally-led kai systems in the Waikato.</p>	<p>Communications</p>		
	<p>Policy & Advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and present policy recommendations based on local food security data and insights. 		<p>Policy recommendations were developed and shared based on local food security data, research insights, and lived experience from across the Waikato. These insights were drawn from community engagement, regional hui, and analysis that highlighted both systemic barriers and locally-led solutions. This work helped inform policy and funding conversations by grounding recommendations in real-world evidence and Kaupapa Māori perspectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Webinar with ThinkPlace on the Lived Experience report. 		<p>To protect Māori data sovereignty, those who contributed to the story in Maniapoto will decide if and how the document in publicly launched in early 2026.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for sustainable funding models and legislative support for food security initiatives. 		<p>Advocated for more sustainable and long-term funding models to support food security and kai-led initiatives. Engagement with funders, policymakers, and sector partners emphasised the need for funding approaches that reflect the complexity and longevity of community-led food systems. This advocacy supported increased awareness of the legislative and funding settings required to enable enduring, locally-driven food security initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kai challenge receives 300 views per quarter 		<p>Kai Pages and News content - 179 views</p>
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain average engagement rate on social media of 9% (target of 12%) 		<p>WWP channels average engagement rate for this period 13.5%</p>

Resources	Activities to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
	1. Waikato Housing Initiative		
	- Develop, in partnership with the Waikato Housing Initiative, a research primer on interventions needed to achieve housing affordability in the Waikato region by 31 August 2025.		Report: Hidden in Plain Sight, the Real Cost of Housing in the Waikato was released in September 2025. The report can be viewed on the WWP website.
	- Share the primer with all stakeholders in the region and seek feedback on the most effective options to pursue across the housing continuum.		A webinar was held on 15 October 2025. Subsequent reports were placed on the WWP website and social media sites. A summary of the report was published in the Waikato Times. A subsequent report on the actions needed to improve affordability for those earning median incomes in the Waikato has been commissioned from Veros and will be completed in February 2026. Funding was provided by Futureproof for this report.
	- Use the primer to contribute towards an updated Waikato Housing Strategy, Regional Spatial Plan and City/Regional Deals.		The WWP has continued to participate as member of the WHI Leadership Team, which guided the commissioning of the Veros work. This work will help to influence reviews of the WHI housing strategy in 2026, as well as the region's spatial and land use plans - for example Futureproof.
	2. State of the Region Report		
	- Complete and publish a report summarising wellbeing and sustainable development progress in the Waikato region by 31 July 2025.		Draft State of the Region Report completed and published in December 2025. Feedback will be considered and a final report released in early 2026.
	- Contribute as requested towards the WIRC strategic priorities PESTLE analysis, Regional Spatial Plan and City/Regional Deals.		WWP attended and contributed towards workshop in February 2025, and reviewed drafts of the PESTLE analysis before its finalisation.
	3. Wellbeing Data		
	- Produce regular quarterly topical and place-specific updates on key wellbeing issues.		Partially achieved - major focus area for 2026 was housing which took significantly longer and was more complex than anticipated
	- Integrate and align with other wellbeing data agencies such as WIRC, MSD, Social Investment Agency via knowledge partnership agreements.		WWP regularly engages with government agencies such as MSD, Kainga Ora and the Social Investment Agency to ensure that the data and knowledge we collate is shared and utilised.
	4. Hauraki Wellbeing Assessment		
	- Completion of the final report for the Hauraki Opportunity by 30 May 2025.		Harvey: Final Report and accompanying datasets were completed and published on WWP website in July 2025
	5. Simplify the Te Ara Poutama Webpage		
	- Redesign the current Te Ara Poutama web page so that it is easier for people to navigate and extract knowledge from.		Quanta: Web pages successfully redesigned and relaunched with support from Kaz Design

Outputs to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
Accessible and Relevant Knowledge		
Waikato Housing Initiative		
- A first draft primer document on improved housing affordability in the Waikato region by June 2025.		Report: Hidden in Plain Sight, the Real Cost of Housing in the Waikato was released in September 2025.
- At least one public webinar to share the results of research into housing affordability. Presentation of the results of the primer to WHI and stakeholders mid-2025.		Webinar held in October and results shared with WHI and stakeholders.
State of the Region		
- Waikato State of the Region Report completed and published by 31st July 2025.		Draft report completed and published on WWP website.
Wellbeing Data		
- At least 1 place based or topical update per month.		Not fully achieved - major focus areas were on housing where several articles and presentations were made across the year.
- Quarterly district dashboards updated and published quarterly on Te Ara Poutama website.		Dashboard from Dot Loves Data published every quarter on the Te Ara Poutama website
Hauraki Wellbeing Assessment		
- Final report presented to all key Hauraki stakeholders by 30 June 2025.		Final report shared with all project partners and stakeholders in July 2025
- Agreement with Te Tara o te Whai and other partners on next steps.		WWP is a member of the Te Tara o te Whai Alliance and the results of the Hauraki Opportunity have been integrated into their programme of priorities - for example work by TCDC on community priorities for their upcoming Annual Plan and Spatial Plan.
- Agreement on data sovereignty and management.		A data sovereignty and security protocol was developed to ensure that the data and information collated during the Hauraki Opportunity was held safely and securely and properly used. This has been used to guide requests for data access.
Communications		
- An updated and redesigned Te Ara Poutama web page live by 30 September 2025.		Te Ara Poutama web pages fully designed and relaunched in late 2025
- At least 4 wellbeing knowledge webinars held by 1 December 2025.		Not fully achieved - webinars held on housing
- Progress reports to Trust Waikato as per the accountability agreement. Outcomes Impacts		Progress reports submitted as per schedule, and summary presentation on WWP made to Trustees at Trust Waikato Strategic Planning workshop 20 August 2025.
- Te Ara Poutama website page to receive over 150 views per quarter.		459 views
- Maintain an average engagement rate on social media of 9% (target of 12%).		WWP channels average engagement rate for this period 13.5%

Resources	Activities to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
			
	Research, film, produce and release 8 new stories between May 25 and May 26 (season 3).		Five new stories were researched, captured and shared via WWP website and social media platforms in 2025. While fewer than was originally anticipated, each story goes into far greater depth than previously and as a result is a far stronger asset for the people and organisations profiled.
	Secure between 33-50% co-funding for LOLF by end of May 26 to transition into new state.		A business case for Lots of Little Fires to become a stand alone self-funded entity was developed in early 2025. Discussions were held from mid 2025 with a consortium from Seed Waikato, Len Reynolds Trust and Creative Waikato about the next steps for Lots of Little Fires. As a result, Lots of Little Fires fully transferred to Seed Waikato in December 2025 and will be fully funded by Seed with support from the consortium. A Memorandum of Understanding between WWP and Seed ensures that the connection between LOLF and WWP is maintained and the WWP is able to continue to share the LOLF stories, insights and breakthroughs on its platforms.
	Complete funding strategy and future state of LOLF work in relation to WWP's final year.		The business case fully addressed the need for a new funding strategy and led to the agreement with Seed Waikato.
	Maintain and continue to build deep relationships across sectors to access new stories, opportunities to support and levers of influence to pull.		Strong relationships built and maintained across the community, Māori and for purpose sector which creates the foundation for the five stories shared this season.
	Build YouTube subscriber base to over 1000.		462 subscribers
	Engagement and workshop LOLF with 5 educational organisations and business CSR.		While not fully achieved, LOLF engaged with several educational and other organisation in 2025, helping people in the region see themselves, their struggles and their agency reflected in the media, providing not just representation but models for action and resilience. This sense of connection and possibility is a form of empowerment that strengthens individual and collective capacity to pursue wellbeing choices.

Outputs to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
Raised awareness		
- An average of 15,000 YouTube views per story released.		As at January 2026, the 5 stories released in 2025 had attracted an average of 49,000 views each, a 58% increase over 2024.
- Creation of Lots of Little Fires website content to receive over 500 views per quarter.		Average of 1302 views per quarter
- Maintain average engagement rate on social media of 9% (target of 12%).		WWP channels average engagement rate for this period 13.5%
- Build social media following to over 1000.		Facebook 1,200 Instagram 681
- Tangible funding, connections and advocacy for story recipients to further their kaupapa.		While systemic change is inherently long-term, LOLF has been used as an evidence tool in policy and service dialogues and has contributed to informed thinking around transitional housing, youth services and community-led solutions. WWP reporting indicates that these narratives have reached decision-makers and influenced how ideas are framed within policy spaces.
- Inspire and influence societal change and support for stories released.		LOLF has helped develop and celebrate leadership distributed widely across the Waikato, recognising leaders from diverse cultural, professional and lived-experience backgrounds. Its influence has helped expand what leadership is seen as — beyond formal roles to include community stewards, activists and grassroots innovators — reinforcing collective responsibility for wellbeing
- Maintain average engagement rate on social media of 9% (target of 12%)		Lots of Little Fires - 58% engagement rate driven by the huge number of shares on this post www.facebook.com/share/p/1T6LjxY5Y/

Resources	Activities to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
	Scaling up our Work		
	- In accordance with the WWP review, significantly increase the "scaling up" of the WWP's insights through greater advocacy and partnerships with organisations mandated to deliver community wellbeing and prosperity.		Harvey
	- Scale up advocacy for systems change initiatives in key areas of kai (food security, housing affordability and homelessness, rangatahi wellbeing and gender equality).		Harvey
	- WWP newsletter - 5 yearly.		Harvey: Five WWP newsletters were released in February, May, July, October and December 2025.
	- Submissions lodged - at least 10 yearly, including at least 3 joint submissions on a local, national or international scale which align with our priority areas		Harvey: Eight submissions or advocacy pieces were made in 2025 including (1) Changes to the Local government Act, (2) Māori Wards, (3) Hamilton City and Waikato District 3 Waters Proposals, (4) WEL Energy Trust Annual Plan, (5) Letter to

Outputs to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
Greater collaboration		
- At least 20 joint initiatives between the WWP and other for purpose organisations by 1 March 2026.		Harvey
- Contribution to the 2025 SDG Alliance Peoples' Report.		Harvey
- Submissions published on WWP Website to receive 100 views per quarter.		Average quarterly views on advocacy - 71
- Maintain average engagement rate on social media of 9% (target of 12%).		Amy
- Broker opportunities with Social Investment Agency, local authorities, iwi and community funders for a Waikato specific approach to social investment and wellbeing knowledge.		Harvey: The WWP has worked closely with Trust Waikato, Social Investment Agency, Waikato Tainui, University of Waikato and other stakeholders to explore opportunities to embed and deploy the social investment approach in the Waikato region. This culminated in the Waikato Social Investment summit held in November 2025, which included presentations from Hon. Nicola Willis, Rhenia Vaihacharhan (AUT), Alistair Mason (SA acting CEO), Donna Fawell, Dennis Turton and Julie Nelson. A working group has now been established to further advance these ideas in 2026, which includes the WWP.

Resources	Activities to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
Org. Effectiveness	- Accountability reports and presentations to WEL Energy Trust and WRC May and September 2025		Harvey: Reports provided as per schedule
	- Annual presentations to Waikato Mayoral Forum and WRC as requested		Harvey: Annual presentation made to Waikato Regional Council, August 2025
	- New Transition Leadership Group established by 30 June 2025		Harvey: New TLG successfully established and meetings held in June, August, November and December 2025
	- Terms of Reference for WWP review next stages agreed by 31 July 2025		Harvey: TLG Terms of Reference developed and signed off in June 2025

Outputs to 31 January 2026	Progress	Comment
- Actual expenditures per program initiatives to date.		Harvey: Actual project expenditure within budget.
- WWP Business Plan published on WWP website by 1 May 2025.		Harvey: Business Plan published on WWP website 14 May 2025.
- WWP managed and delivered within Business Plan budget.		Harvey: WWP successful managed within budget
- Overall project co-funding (cash and in-kind) of at least \$3.8m by June 2025.		Harvey: Cash and Non-cash-funding for WWP \$2.448m at 30 June 2025 (note that the Partnership and Funding Agreement refers to \$2m, not \$3m)
- Preferred option for the new operating and funding model agreed by 1 December 2025.		Harvey: Achieved - TLG signed off preferred model option in November 2025
- Maintain Newsletter Open Rate of 48%+ (Target 50%+).		Open rate of 63.5% (benchmark = 19.4%)
- Maintain Newsletter CTR Rate of 7%+ (Target 8%+).		Click through rate of 9.41% (benchmark = 2.8%)
- Maintain Website traffic of 2,000+ visitors per quarter.		3,500 visits for this period

Attachment 2. Summary Statistics

WWP Business Plan: Progress Metrics 2025

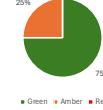
Poutoko	Activities			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	0	0	0	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	100%	0%	0%	

WWP 2025 Activities: Poutoko (Kai Challenge)



Poutoko	Outputs			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	0	0	2	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	75%	25%	0%	

WWP 2025 Outputs: Poutoko (Kai Challenge)



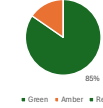
Te Ara Poutama	Activities			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	9	8	1	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	89%	11%	0%	

WWP 2025 Activities: Te Ara Poutama



Te Ara Poutama	Outputs			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	13	11	2	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	85%	15%	0%	

WWP 2025 Outputs: Te Ara Poutama



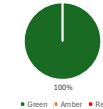
Lots of Little Fires	Activities			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	6	3	3	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	50%	50%	0%	

WWP 2025 Activities: Lots of Little Fires



Lots of Little Fires	Outputs			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	7	7	0	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	100%	0%	0%	

WWP 2025 Outputs: Lots of Little Fires



Advocacy	Activities			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	4	4	0	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	100%	0%	0%	

WWP 2025 Activities: Advocacy



Advocacy	Outputs			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	5	4	1	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	80%	20%	0%	

WWP 2025 Outputs: Advocacy



OrG Effectiveness	Activities			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	4	4	0	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	100%	0%	0%	

WWP 2025 Activities: Org Effectiveness



OrG Effectiveness	Outputs			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	8	8	0	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	100%	0%	0%	

WWP 2025 Outputs: Org Effectiveness



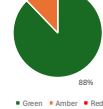
Overall	Activities			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	31	27	4	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	87%	13%	0%	

WWP 2025: All Activities



Overall	Outputs			
	Number	Green	Amber	Red
	41	36	5	0
Percentage	Green	Amber	Red	
	88%	12%	0%	

WWP 2025: All Outputs





**Waikato
wellbeing
project**

Hinonga
toiora o
Waikato

Research . Knowledge . Storytelling

www.waikatowellbeingproject.co.nz