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Follow-up Submission: Draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan 2026–27

Dear Joe and Kimberley,

This is a follow-up to my earlier submission and subsequent correspondence with Council. I was pleased to see the plan updated in response to community feedback.

This submission raises a concern that the plan is primarily structured around satisfying the Performance Improvement Order (PIO) rather than articulating a long-term vision for Kiama's future. Financial recovery and governance improvement are necessary. The concern is that financial recovery has become the organising logic of the plan.

1. Which draft document does your feedback relate to?

Draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan 2026–27.

2. Do you support the draft?

Partially. The financial and governance work is necessary. The plan is not sufficient as a long-term strategic document for the Kiama community.

3. Reason: A plan shaped by the PIO, not the future

The DPOP covers year two of a four-year Delivery Program under the Community Strategic Plan 2025–2035. In practice it reads as a PIO exit strategy.

The evidence:

The CEO's message states the organisation is laser focused on financial sustainability and governance as it enters the final year of the PIO.

The Implementation team exists almost entirely to manage PIO-related priorities, service reviews, the Strategic Finance and Governance Improvement Plan, internal audit, and the PIO Oversight Committee.

A significant proportion of deliverables across all four focus areas are compliance and governance tasks, policy reviews, system migrations, audit activities and reporting, rather than community investments.

The financial framing centres on efficiency, asset divestment and cost reduction with limited articulation of what the community gains once financial stability is achieved.

A Delivery Program under a 10-year Community Strategic Plan should signal what kind of place Kiama intends to be in 2029, 2032 and 2035 and begin building toward it now. This plan does not do that.

4. Further comments and feedback

Recovery without direction

Financial sustainability is a precondition for good governance, not an end in itself. What investments in community infrastructure, services or environmental protection will become possible once PIO obligations are met? This question is not answered in the plan.

Long-term challenges requiring strategic attention

Kiama faces structural challenges that extend well beyond the current financial cycle. The DPOP touches on some but does not treat them with the urgency they deserve:

- Coastal hazard risk: work on coastal management programs and interim protection works is acknowledged but the implications for built assets, open space and community safety need more integrated strategic treatment.
- Housing supply and affordability: LEP and DCP reviews and ISJO collaboration are noted. Given housing pressures across the Illawarra, a clearer statement of Council's position and ambition is needed.
- Demographic change: Kiama has an ageing population and slow growth. Commitments to seniors services and accessible facilities are welcome but a more explicit demographic strategy addressing workforce, services and infrastructure would strengthen the plan's long-term credibility.
- Climate resilience: Net Zero and Community Emissions Reduction commitments are supported but need stronger integration with asset management, infrastructure planning and land use decisions.

Blue Haven Terralong

Blue Haven is referenced across multiple sections as a significant financial and operational commitment. The community has a legitimate interest in understanding the strategic direction, the market sounding process, the implications of different management models, and how the asset fits within Council's long-term financial and property strategy. A clearer and more consolidated explanation is needed.

Contingent deliverables

Identifying contingent deliverables is appreciated. This approach should be applied consistently across the whole document with plain-language explanations of what contingency means in practice for affected services and communities.

Outcome-based measures

Most measures describe what Council will do rather than what difference it will make. Outcome-based measures are best practice for integrated planning documents and would improve accountability and community confidence.

5. Who would be most affected?

- Residents who rely on Council services and facilities, particularly those with limited alternatives.
- Older residents and people with disability who depend on accessible local services, including Blue Haven residents.
- Young people who rely on Council-run programs and spaces, with several youth services flagged as contingent on budget decisions.
- Community organisations dependent on Council funding, venues or support.
- Coastal and low-lying properties exposed to climate and hazard risk.
- Council staff affected by ongoing service reviews and restructuring.

6. Impacts and risks of most concern

- Short-term financial decision-making that delays investment in Kiama's future resilience.
- Coastal and climate risks not being addressed at the pace or scale required.
- Service reductions affecting community cohesion, particularly for vulnerable residents.
- Long-term financial obligations around Blue Haven and any Special Rate Variation that are not sufficiently explained in public.
- A community asked to endorse a plan without a clear picture of the trade-offs being made.

7. What could help?

- A clear statement of what Kiama is working toward beyond the PIO, not simply what Council is managing through.
- Integration of financial strategy with community outcomes so decisions about efficiency and asset management are linked to their intended community benefits.
- Plain-language summaries of the impact of service changes on specific community groups.
- Earlier and more structured community engagement on significant decisions around Blue Haven, any Special Rate Variation and major asset divestments.
- Outcome-based reporting so the community can track whether Council's activities are making a difference.

8. Other ideas

- Publish a concise State of Kiama document setting out the community's challenges, assets and opportunities over the next decade to provide context for the DPOP and support informed community engagement.
- Develop a post-PIO agenda identifying the community investments Council intends to prioritise once financial recovery is achieved.
- Explore shared services and regional collaboration more explicitly where Kiama's scale makes standalone delivery inefficient.
- Strengthen the visible connection between the DPOP and the Community Strategic Plan 2025–2035 so the long-term vision is traceable through the annual operational commitments.

Closing

Financial recovery and strategic planning are different tasks. The current DPOP addresses the first far more strongly than the second.

The final year of the PIO is an opportunity to meet compliance obligations and begin articulating a clearer vision for Kiama's future. The community deserves both.

Yours sincerely,

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