



# PUKETĀPAPA RECOVERY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

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A report for the Recovery Office

November 2023

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## Acknowledgements

Our grateful thanks are extended to all who participated in this research; the community stakeholders, community members, and Auckland Council staff who shared their time, knowledge, and experience.

We acknowledge the pressures that many participants were working through as the Puketāpapa community continues to recover from the impact of the extreme weather events. The openness and warmth with which all participated is appreciated.

Ngā mihi nui ki a koutou.

The project was commissioned and funded by Auckland Council.

## Executive Summary

The Puketāpapa Local Board area was significantly impacted by two weather events in early 2023. A strong community-led response involving many local community groups and businesses activated quickly to meet the wide-ranging needs of affected residents.

It is recognised that ongoing needs remain in the community as a result of these events, with the Recovery Office at Auckland Council seeking to capture these via a needs assessment. This document details findings from the mixed methods research study undertaken to inform this work.

Support provided during the response generally involved an amplification or extension of existing services and incorporated a wide range of activities, including the provision of food and accommodation, information sharing, distribution of household goods, and the clean-up of homes.

Much of the response work was led out of a hub established at Wesley Primary School, with other aspects delivered independently at other locations across Puketāpapa. There were a range of factors identified as having worked well in the community-led response, including:

- The **central hub** established at Wesley Primary School, with its size and wide range of facilities available, location within a trusted school, and well organised systems highlighted as key assets.
- **Strong collaboration** across a range of actors facilitated sharing of resources and information, good communication between different stakeholders, and effective joined up working.
- An extensive and rapidly mobilised **volunteer network** played a key role in managing the flow of donations, establishing operational systems, and undertaking practical activities.
- The **flexibility of leaders and organisations** which adapted their ways of working or introduced new approaches worked well, alongside the **network relationships with key decision makers** which were drawn on to expedite support during this time.
- **Skilled, well connected, and trusted community leaders** with a range of relevant skills and expertise were effective in engaging local residents, and **social media** facilitated the dissemination of information and engagement of support.

While the response in Puketāpapa was viewed as exemplary in many ways, the research identified some challenges. These included **meeting diverse ethnic, cultural and accessibility community needs, resourcing constraints**, and the **health and well-being of those involved** in the community-led response. **A lack of overall coordination** of the response resulted in some inefficiencies and a chaotic environment at times.

Community stakeholders reported that there are significant ongoing needs in the community, linked to issues that have either not been resolved from the immediate aftermath of the flooding, or have developed since this time. It is believed that the weather events exacerbated existing needs in the community, and that the nature and extent of needs may not be fully known given that some residents face barriers in seeking assistance. Key recovery needs identified included:

- **Mental health and wellbeing needs** were linked to a range of issues including ongoing trauma from the events, anxiety about future adverse weather occurrences, stress in addressing the impacts of the events, isolation and loneliness, and grief.
- **Support with family and relationship stressors** was associated with overworked and stressed parents struggling to meet ends meet and people living together in sub-optimal housing conditions.

- **Housing and accommodation needs** involves families forced to leave their properties due to flooding which has resulted in some living in accommodation which is not fit for purpose, a loss of family and other support networks, overcrowding, and psychological impacts as a result of housing instability. Some families are still living in damaged properties that they cannot afford to repair.
- **Meeting basic household needs**, such as food and accommodation costs, remains difficult for some due to financial pressures.
- **Unresolved insurance claims** are adding to an already stressful situation, with language barriers and a lack of evidence to support claims creating additional challenges.
- **Access to information and support** is restricted due to a lack of awareness of support options, confusing or complex pathways to help, language barriers, a lack of documentation, and a reluctance amongst some residents to ask for help.
- **Infrastructure needs** relate to ongoing problems with water or drainage systems, and paths or roads, with concerns raised about the capacity of current systems to withstand future adverse weather events.

Community organisations have taken on a number of roles as part of recovery efforts, including: **connecting community members** to services and support options; providing **space to socialise, gather and connect**; delivering **community events** as means of reducing isolation; **supporting families to meet basic needs** (e.g. via food parcels); providing formal and informal **psychological support**; and contributing to **planning efforts for future adverse weather events**.

Longer terms concerns regarding local area risks include anxiety about the overall safety of the area, a lack of community preparedness for future weather events, infrastructure capability, redevelopment and intensification, and threats to the natural environment. When considering Auckland Council's future role in recovery efforts, community stakeholders are seeking streamlined, 'joined up' systems, improved engagement and communication, and enhanced infrastructure and planning. They also wish to see that their work is valued by council, and sufficiently resourced to enable them to continue to carry out their recovery work.

## 1. Introduction

Tāmaki Makaurau experienced two severe weather events in early 2023 – flooding on January 27<sup>th</sup> and Cyclone Gabrielle in mid-February. The Puketāpapa Local Board area was significantly impacted by these events (particularly the January flooding) with many local community groups and businesses activating quickly to meet the wide-ranging needs of affected residents.

The community-led response which eventuated was viewed as exemplary in many ways, particularly in relation to the extent of connection and collaboration across stakeholders, the response leaders' degree of confidence operating in an emergency environment, and their capacity and capability to meet the needs of their community.

It is recognised that ongoing needs remain in the community as a result of these events. This document presents findings from the Puketāpapa needs assessment commissioned by the Recovery Office at Auckland council, which explored:

- Success stories and challenges faced during the January flooding and Cyclone Gabrielle
- How organisations responded
- The needs that presented directly after the two events and those that have yet to be addressed
- Auckland Council's role going forward
- Longer-term concerns regarding local area risks.

This study was combined with a 'lessons learned case study' research project commissioned by Auckland Emergency Management (AEM) which explored the nature of the response, facilitators of the community-led approach, and learning regarding capacity building for the future. These findings are presented in a separate report.

### Research approach

A mixed methods approach was undertaken for the research, comprised of the following:

**Document analysis:** This involved a review of documents provided by Auckland Council and stakeholder interviewees.

**Interviews with community leaders and stakeholders:** A mix of one-on-one semi-structured interviews (n= 8) and paired/group discussions (n=7)<sup>1</sup> were conducted with key community response leaders, Auckland Council staff, and other community stakeholders. One community organisation provided written responses to interview questions. A total of n=29 individuals participated in stakeholder discussions between August and October 2023.

Auckland Council staff identified and facilitated introductions to research participants. Discussions were between 60 and 90 minutes in duration and included a mix of face-to-face and online meetings. Participants<sup>2</sup> were provided with a \$100 Prezy card to acknowledge their time and contribution to the research.

**Interviews with community members:** This involved two online interviews around 40 minutes in duration with local residents, which explored their experiences of the two weather events, support or

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<sup>1</sup> Groups ranged in size from two to five participants.

<sup>2</sup> This excluded Auckland Council staff.

assistance accessed, and ongoing needs since this time. Community stakeholders identified and facilitated introductions to these individuals, and participants received a \$40 grocery voucher.

### **This report**

This document presents findings relating to both response and recovery efforts in Puketāpapa as a result of the two weather events, but primarily reflects interviewees' focus on the Auckland anniversary weekend flooding and the significant impacts this had on the community. It is important to note that reporting is not an exhaustive list of all community-led response and recovery work, as not all groups or organisations involved in this, participated in the research.

## 2. Overview of the community-led response and emerging needs

This section provides an overview of the community-driven response in addressing the impact of the adverse weather events in the Puketāpapa community.

### Impact of January flooding on residents

The heavy rains that struck Puketāpapa on the evening of Friday, January 27th, had a widespread impact, affecting residents to varying degrees. The Wesley area bore the brunt of the flooding, particularly in the residential regions bordering Oakley Creek, with O'Donnell Ave and adjacent areas severely affected. Numerous homes in this vicinity suffered flooding, with water rising to significant depths. The extensive flooding in some streets severely restricted residents' ability to leave their homes and seek refuge. Cars were submerged, belongings were swept away or damaged, and the streets were strewn with debris as waters receded.

*The gush of water was coming from each street. I've never seen a thing in my life ever. It's like I went through one street to try and get away from the other street that the water was coming through and that street also had a rush of water. (Community stakeholder)*

In addition to physical damage, the flood had profound psychological effects on many community members. Interviewees noted that numerous residents experienced fear, shock, a sense of being "frozen," and uncertainty about how to respond. It was described as the feeling of an apocalyptic scenario.

Findings from this research indicate that in the days following the flooding, the psychological toll continued to rise as residents grappled with the growing realisation of the damage incurred, and experienced difficulties in accessing support. Stress levels increased, leaving residents more vulnerable. Some groups, such as older residents and individuals with disabilities, faced greater challenges evacuating flooded properties. Migrants with limited English proficiency encountered barriers in accessing information and services, and for some in the community, visiting welfare centres felt uncomfortable and unsafe.

### Residents' immediate needs

Emergency accommodation was a primary need in the 48 hours following the flooding, with those seeking shelter including both displaced residents whose homes had flooded, and others who feared theirs may be engulfed. Some residents required transport to places of safety.

Information was a further key need – with residents seeking up-to-date risk and safety information, and details of the availability and location of assistance. Interviewees indicated that levels of knowledge around what to do varied considerably across the community with some residents lacking basic safety information. It was felt that this was exacerbated by an insufficient level of official communications, some of which was not in appropriate channels or languages for many community members.

*On that night, people didn't know, so they panicked – is it going to come inside? Some just sat there not knowing what to do because no one knew what to do, they had never experienced that. And some just got up and left. (Community stakeholder)*



As those requiring refuge were accommodated in shelters, longer-term emergency accommodation, or the homes of others, food in the form of cooked meals and food parcels, bedding, clothing, and hygiene products became further urgent needs.

## The community-led response

### A community mobilisation

A broad range of Puketāpapa community leaders and networks mobilised rapidly to support those impacted by the flooding. This included community groups and NGOs, churches, community service providers, schools, foodbanks, businesses, and volunteers. Organisational responses were generally an amplification of services already provided, with one key exception being schools and other organisations that, in contrast to their usual activities, provided overnight shelter to residents. Responses generally incorporated, but were not limited to, the following broad areas:

- opening community centres/schools or other premises for those requiring shelter and as places to gather, wash, cook, and sleep
- relocating affected residents to shelters
- provision of food – both groceries and cooked meals
- information sharing, including translating key messages into diverse languages and formats
- fielding requests for information or assistance and connecting people with services and support
- assessing welfare needs and sharing information with residents, including via door-knocking
- coordinating the acquisition, collection, and distribution of donations
- transport and storage of donated goods
- clean-up of homes and removal of flood-damaged items
- transport and storage of possessions.

The response to the January flooding was multifaceted, with various aspects handled independently or in coordination with the Wesley-based response (see below) as the situation evolved. Shelters were established at different locations, some spontaneously as needs arose, and others in collaboration with other centres.

*Then I realised how bad it was... And so, we started picking up families and helping families move right there on that evening and checking on homes... So that's how it started and then we decided we better go open up the Centre and we let some families in and picked them up and left them there, let them stay overnight. (Community stakeholder)*

As floodwaters receded and the immediate needs of displaced residents were met, community responders mobilised to address the aftermath. Volunteers played a crucial role in clearing impacted homes, salvaging possessions, removing flood-damaged items, and cleaning interiors.

### The Wesley School hub

The Wesley Primary School hub emerged as the core of the community-led response, initially established to provide emergency accommodation for nearby residents forced to evacuate from inundated streets. Over the first few days of the response, the number of overnight residents increased, with some individuals moved from other impromptu shelters that lacked long-term facilities. This hub also provided a safe space for residents to gather, share experiences, and receive assistance from familiar and trusted individuals.

*It's almost like they didn't know what to do next but it was just providing that safe space where they could have a talanoa or kōrero... to focus on the present day. (Community stakeholder)*

Existing networks were utilised to source and distribute the resources needed by affected families. A significant number of locals sought material assistance in the initial days, with resources distributed including food parcels, emergency supplies, water, cleaning materials, bedding, towels, and clothing. As word spread, the school became a central hub for various services and supports, with Acts of Roskill Kindness (ARK) and other leaders, including those from Global Hope Missions, playing a coordinating role among actors including community and government services, and liaising with other aspects of the broader community-led response. Government agencies – Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Kāinga Ora – established a presence, enabling an expedited in-person point of contact with affected clients.

Over time, collaborations between organisations led to culturally sensitive responses for the diverse Puketāpapa community. This involved translation services, the provision of culturally appropriate food, and suitable emergency accommodation.

Around one week after the initial rainstorm, an additional hub was established at Wesley Community Centre. This took charge of collecting, sorting, and distributing community donations for approximately one month, in addition to coordinating clean-up volunteers.

## Strengths of the community-led response

Key strengths of the community-led response are summarised in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Strengths of the community-led response in Puketāpapa**

Strength	Description
The establishment of an efficient, central hub run by well-known community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A key response to the January flooding was the establishment of a facility on site at Wesley Primary School where support and assistance was provided to individuals and families across a range of areas.</li> <li>• The hub's size and the facilities available (e.g. an area where people could sleep) enabled it to meet a wide range of community needs. Locating it within a school meant that it was a well-known and trusted space, which helped facilitate access to residents who were uncomfortable seeking help from unfamiliar sources.</li> </ul>
Effective collaboration between key stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This included collaboration across a range of actors, comprising local NGOs, schools, staff from government agencies, volunteers, the business community, and local and central government representatives.</li> <li>• There were reports of the sharing of resources and information, good communication between different stakeholders, and effective joined up working to meet the needs of displaced residents. This included people calling on others to address specific needs that they were unable to meet (e.g. liaising with non-English speaking residents).</li> </ul>
An extensive and rapidly mobilised volunteer network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There was an extensive network of individuals who volunteered their time, personal resources, and skills and expertise, including both Puketāpapa residents and those living outside of the area.</li> <li>• Some organisations had an existing network of volunteers that they drew on, whereas others spoke about people previously unknown to them offering their assistance.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role played by volunteers included logistical aspects (e.g. establishing operational systems), practical activities (e.g., clearing damaged properties), and provision of professional advice or guidance.</li> </ul>
Flexible and adaptable leaders and organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There were widespread examples of individuals and organisations adapting to meet the needs of the local community as they emerged during the events, often at short notice.</li> <li>Some organisations focused on their usual delivery of services, but amplified what they did. Others implemented different ways of working or adapted their premises in response to community needs (e.g. schools providing accommodation).</li> <li>New approaches were implemented to ensure that marginalised residents were not overlooked in the response. This included outreach activities such as door knocking in neighbourhoods, which was effective at identifying isolated residents and/or those who were hesitant to access help.</li> </ul>
Skilled, well-connected, and trusted community leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Those leading the response and/or who played a key role during this time were competent in a range of areas (e.g. communications, logistics) which provided access to an extensive skill base.</li> <li>Many were seen to be well connected both within Puketāpapa and more broadly, which extended the reach of their efforts and helped facilitate support from a broader range of stakeholders</li> </ul>
Social media as a tool for the dissemination of information and engagement of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social media was utilised extensively during the community-led response. This mostly included Facebook, and to a lesser degree WhatsApp.</li> <li>These channels were employed to share service and support information, gather resources and volunteer support, and as part of coordination efforts.</li> </ul>

## Challenges faced in responding to the weather events

Key challenges of the community-led response are summarised in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Challenges of the community-led response in Puketāpapa

Challenge	Description
Meeting diverse community needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The diversity of the Puketāpapa Local Board presented some challenges to those involved in the community-led response, particularly in relation to meeting a range of ethnic, cultural, and accessibility needs (e.g. catering to different dietary requirements).</li> <li>It took time to put measures in place to address these different needs, including ensuring that the response was culturally safe. This included translating and disseminating information in a range of languages, finding suitable spaces and bringing in appropriate organisations to work with individual communities.</li> </ul>
Limited resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resourcing constraints included limited people capacity, and restricted food or equipment supplies.</li> <li>It was felt by some that there was a lack of resourcing (funding and equipment) provided to Puketāpapa via official channels, with the level provided viewed as inequitable, particularly when compared with other areas across Tāmaki Makaurau.</li> <li>As a result, local stakeholders relied on donations – particularly from the business community – or drew on their own funds or other resources to supply the range of activities or goods required to meet community needs.</li> </ul>

Safeguarding the health and wellbeing of those involved in the community-led response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteers and those leading the response were working for significant periods with limited breaks, while also interacting with distressed community members and dealing with the impacts of the events on their own properties or family networks.</li> <li>• Concerns were expressed about the impact of this on their mental and physical health.</li> </ul>
Overall coordination of the response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community-led response was a significant undertaking, which required a high level of resources, involved a large number of people, and incorporated a wide range of community and other organisations.</li> <li>• While a key strength of the response was the creation of a central hub at Wesley, it was believed by some that there was a lack of overall coordination, including a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.</li> <li>• This was felt to contribute to a chaotic or tense environment, a duplication of efforts in some cases, and inefficient distribution of donated goods.</li> </ul>
Other challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other challenges identified included the timing of the flooding event at the start of a long weekend, which limited the response of some organisations, and a lack of preparedness among local residents.</li> </ul>

### 3. Recovery needs in Puketāpapa

The research explored the ongoing needs of the community following the two weather events, with key findings presented in the sections that follow.

It was widely reported that **significant ongoing needs remain within the community**, ranging from mental health issues through to insurance related matters (these are discussed further below). Identified needs include issues that have either still not been resolved from the immediate aftermath, or have developed since this time:

*There are still people putting things up there [on Facebook] who are still trying to get themselves together. And here we are in October just about at our celebration festive time and people are still trying to sort life out, and theirs has stopped on January 27<sup>th</sup>.  
(Community stakeholder)*

A minority of individuals indicated that they felt most needs had now been addressed, with several also highlighting that it was likely that **some needs remain hidden** due to people not coming forward for assistance. This included those who were either unsure where or how to access help – or even that it was available – as well as others who may feel uncomfortable accessing external support for their situation:

*I think people don't tell anybody. The only reason I'm actually picking these things up is when I actually meet them in the public area and I say to them "How are you doing? How's your recovery?", then they start talking and that's when you hear that they actually need help. I'd say, they're not the ones to put up their hand to say I need help, they are the ones that will keep it in within them. (Community stakeholder)*

One interviewee felt that cultural aspects played a role in people's willingness to reach out for help from others, with some communities viewing it as inappropriate:

*They [Indian and Chinese communities] are communities that generally don't ask for support because they come from cultures where you help yourself, do or die. There's no such thing as government welfare. So they sometimes don't know that you can get support. (Community stakeholder)*

It was reported that some of the **identified needs were evident in the community prior to the flooding** but were exacerbated by the weather events. This incorporated residents who were already struggling financially, including as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic or the current economic climate. Consequently, the flooding and/or cyclone added another layer to already complex situations, and eroded residents' ability to manage pre-existing – and sometimes significant – challenges:

*We started before then, but it ramped up through COVID and I think it's not died down, in fact it's ramped up even more... I think it's on top of a base that was [already] struggling.  
(Community stakeholder)*

*The flood kind of exacerbated the effects of poverty that we see here, and so there is regular food scarcity, there's regular issues around that. It seems like a lot of people are hurting. (Community stakeholder)*

## Overview of key recovery needs

This section presents an overview of the identified needs in the Puketāpapa community which remain following the two weather events.

### Mental health and wellbeing

The mental health impacts of the January flooding on residents featured strongly in discussions with community stakeholders, with ongoing needs related to these seen to be a key priority for many.

These were reported to be linked to a range of issues, including:

- The **trauma of the event itself**, which was reported to be ongoing for many in the community.
- **Anxiety about future adverse weather events**. Interviewees spoke about people feeling very anxious about the potential for future events of a similar nature and what might happen to them or their family should these occur. This was often triggered by heavy rain in the community, and evident amongst both adults and children.
- **Stress** in addressing the impacts of the events, including settling insurance claims, finding appropriate accommodation, and meeting additional financial commitments. The emotional toll of ongoing uncertainty was also seen to be affecting some residents.
- **Isolation and loneliness** was seen to be a result of housing disruption, with some families relocated in areas away from usual supports.
- **Grief**, primarily related to a loss of treasured and irreplaceable possessions (e.g. family photos).

*I think that the mental stress and the strain has been such an ongoing thing that I don't think people know how to step out of it. (Community stakeholder)*

*They're still going through the grief, all their family memories, photos are gone, everything just gone in the flood and the only thing that was left was, this staff member of mine, was the clothes that she was wearing. (Community stakeholder)*

Community stakeholders spoke about these issues exacerbating existing mental health conditions, with people in this situation even more susceptible to negative outcomes from the weather events. Others highlighted that the impacts had built over time for some individuals, with those affected increasingly vulnerable due to ongoing stress, challenges in addressing issues presented by the flooding or cyclone, and the associated exhaustion from these efforts.

*Just rain is enough to trigger them to think like one time we were training at a rugby field and it started pouring, people got up and just ran straight to their cars. Like this is unreal. I haven't even seen this before... you're talking about guys who, big, strong ... they just ran, gone, just apologising as they go. (Community stakeholder)*

Interviewees noted that the burden carried by residents was not always recognised or acknowledged, and that the mental and emotional strain sometimes only becomes apparent when people come together and shared experiences.

*There will be a lot of psychological impacts...this lady she came to our event and she mentioned about this. After the flood they moved to the hotel ... It was so much loneliness and it affected her a lot. So she came because we share our information like the events and came and then met here all the other friends and families... And after coming here and meeting the people, helped her a lot to recover. (Community stakeholder)*

### Support for family and relationship stressors

Interviewees spoke about the negative impact of the weather events on family relationships and emphasised that this posed an ongoing issue in the community.

As highlighted above, some individuals are experiencing mental health challenges that are impacting their interactions and relations with family members. This includes stressed and overworked parents struggling to make ends meet, with this affecting their parenting style (e.g. less patient with children) and overall capacity to meet their children's needs. One interviewee reflected on the impact of this on parent-child relationships, and highlighted that children are still feeling the effects of this:

*These children probably see another side of their parents which may affect them now too. I think that's scary to see that happening where parents don't realise how much it's seen by the children – that you're sad, you can't think, you're probably a bit angry quicker because you can't make sense out of things. I suppose that will fall into some of the kids' lives.*  
(Community stakeholder)

Increased family tensions were also attributed to people living together in less-than-optimal housing conditions.

While the research has not reviewed data relating to uptake of social services as a result of the adverse weather events, there were anecdotal reports of increased family violence and engagement with Oranga Tamariki within the community. One community stakeholder posited that this was likely to be the cumulative effect of the flooding and/or cyclone, the pandemic, and financial challenges faced by families in the current economic environment.

### Housing and accommodation

Damage to housing was a significant impact of the weather events, with many families forced to leave their properties due to flooding or other destruction incurred as a result. While some residents have been able to return home since this time – either because the damage was low-level or it has since been rectified – others remain displaced and living in a range of different accommodations. This includes people residing with family or friends or in temporary housing such as motels or caravans. The impacts of this are wide-ranging and ongoing. Key issues identified include:

- **Emergency or temporary accommodation may be inappropriate for the needs of families**, including not meeting the requirements of those with a disability, too small for the number of family members, and unsafe environments. It was also reported that some families are not allowed to cook in motel units, restricting what they are able to eat and introducing additional costs related to the purchase of takeaway meals.
- **Loss of family and other support networks.** It was reported that some families have moved permanently to a different area because of their house being uninhabitable, which means they are dislocated from their usual support networks and need to rebuild them. This also includes children having to move to different schools as a result of being housed outside of their community.
- **Overcrowding** due to families being forced to move in together in properties that are not designed to meet the number of occupants. One interviewee also highlighted that flooded garages previously utilised as a space for sleeping meant that houses could become overcrowded as a result.
- **Psychological impacts** of overcrowding, housing instability (e.g. due to moving at short notice) and families living areas outside of their usual community and other networks.

A small number of issues were raised in relation to housing needs specific to people living in rental properties including the lack of housing stock or high rental prices which was seen to be contributing to overcrowding and/or residents living in unsuitable accommodation. One interviewee felt there was less support for private renters compared to those living in Kāinga Ora properties.

*I think the renters, they probably need to find a place, another place to rent and they have got families, children, schools, they've lost their motor vehicles. I think those probably we don't hear from much more now, but their needs haven't gone away. (Community stakeholder)*

It is important to note that there are ongoing housing needs even amongst those who have returned to their usual place of residence, due to the poor state of these properties. This includes people waiting to hear about the “buy back” process, and/or living in flood-damaged properties or “patched up homes” which they cannot afford to fix but are forced to remain in due to a lack of alternative options. For example, one stakeholder spoke about families living in houses that continue to flood when it rains, including one household which is restricted to the upper floor of their property due to significant damage on the lower level. Other comments included:

*She's still living in a really badly flood damaged house, it has not been stickered, so that she can't live in it. But it's not good for her and her family, and is overcrowded... They can't afford to move out, they can't find anything else they can afford and they're trapped in there. (Community stakeholder)*

*They are living in a flood damaged home that they have actually done up to make it liveable. They have got nowhere else to go. Some people have got issues with insurance and of course EQC is involved, so they don't know where they stand with the categorisation of homes... what's going to happen with them? They have got a mortgage to pay and I don't know whether they've had a rates relief. (Community stakeholder)*

### Meeting basic household needs

Interviewees reported that some families are struggling to meet basic household needs. This includes food, clothing, bedding, transport, and furniture or other items required in running a household. In many cases, they cannot afford to replace items lost during the weather events, and are either accessing support in relation to this, or ‘making do’ without these necessities. One example provided included a family who were living in damaged accommodation without a washing machine but did not have the financial means to address the situation. Comments included:

*It's continued to escalate the amount of people who come for support for food. It is continued, it's ongoing. Our pātaka kai is just wiped out all the time. We could fill it 10 times a day and other people are filling it for us as well, but it's just so ongoing. (Community stakeholder)*

Multiple financial pressures underlie these challenges, with many residents already facing financial constraints before the flooding and/or cyclone and struggling to meet basic household needs. Other factors at play include the increased outgoings as a result of the weather events (e.g. replacing damaged goods), alongside a drop in income for some. For example, some families were required to take leave without pay or take time off work to resolve flood-related issues. A lack of insurance, or underinsurance in some cases, has also compounded the situation.



One interviewee believed that impacted families needed to have around \$5000 in reserve to recover from a natural disaster of this nature, and that this was simply not a reality for many people in the Puketāpapa community, due to the pre-existing financial challenges faced by many in the area.

### Unresolved insurance claims

The Anniversary Weekend flooding in particular led to a large number of insurance claims for property damage and lost or destroyed household goods. However, at the time of the research (August-October 2023), it was reported that many residents were still waiting for these to be resolved, with the ongoing impact of this a key theme identified by interviewees. They highlighted that this had added to an already stressful situation and resulted in some homeowners remaining in damaged homes that they could not afford to fix themselves. Further, some had suffered additional financial hardship as a result of covering the cost of lost or damaged items, with reports that some businesses had remained closed due to unresolved or incomplete insurance claims. Other comments included:

*I've had an elderly woman who... she didn't have coffee that day... And her reasoning for not having coffee that day was she's making ends meet. And for her to decide whether to have coffee was a big question, because her insurance hadn't come through... For her, it was knowing the expenses that's going to come after because insurance is not going to cover everything and she's a superannuant. (Community stakeholder)*

While these delays were believed to be primarily caused by insurance companies failing to process claims in a timely manner (e.g., due to staffing shortages), other factors were seen to be at play. These included language barriers for people not fluent in English, as well as a lack of access to an appropriate electronic device or evidence required to support a claim. One interviewee, for example, highlighted that it was simply not possible for some households to provide this due to documentation having been lost during the weather event:

*[If] every single proof is gone, what can you give? I know they said to take photos but... then everything that holds your household information about your insurance - your laptop's probably gone and you haven't got the information you need to give. So a lot of people are still trying to find all the stuff that they need to get insurance. (Community stakeholder)*

### Access to information and support

Interviewees spoke about the importance of information and help to support residents' recovery needs. Examples provided included financial assistance, help with insurance claims, and information regarding the status of properties. However, accessing this was proving difficult for some individuals, with several potential barriers identified. These included:

- A lack of awareness of support options
- Confusing or complex pathways to help
- Language barriers among those for whom English is not their first language
- A reluctance to ask for help, or belief that they do not require help
- A lack of documentation required to access support or process applications, due to this being lost during the weather events.

*Who do I talk to in the council or how do I write an application or something? A lot of people don't know the information, plus not having the ability to kind of articulate what*

*situation you are in. So many times you have to write down saying this all has happened, so you require someone to assist in that kind of way. (Community stakeholder)*

*The Ministry of Social Development says if anyone comes to us, to refer to them to this number if they have accommodation needs. But then those people can't speak English. So do you give them a telephone number where there's no language support? A lot of these things have not been thought out well. (Community stakeholder)*

## Infrastructure

A range of infrastructural needs relating to the recovery process were identified. These mostly related to ongoing problems with water or drainage systems, and paths or roads, with disappointment expressed over the length of time it was taking to remediate problems produced by the flooding and/or cyclone. Concerns were also expressed about the capacity of the current systems to withstand future adverse weather events, and a lack of joined up working in addressing ongoing issues:

*On one street (Richardson Road) we've had road closures and detours for most of the year for stormwater. On another street it has just closed for the burying of electricity and telecommunication cables. ...It seems different departments are not working together and the roads will be closed, detoured and ripped up multiple times. That seems a waste of money, time, resources and also increased/delayed frustration for the community. (Community stakeholder)*

While it was acknowledged that much of this was the responsibility of local or central government, there were reports of this impacting private properties and residents having to address the issues (e.g. unblocking flooded drains):

*What I'm hearing from our community, even though it's private land, the reason that the place is flooded is because infrastructure was allowed to be built where inlets put water into the same places that were private land. (Community stakeholder)*

The effects of this were wide-ranging, and included both the introduction of potential hazards, as well as psychological impacts. For example, one interviewee spoke about the sense of dismay they felt when they saw paths that had still not been repaired nine months on from the weather events, and another told of a situation where neighbours were at odds over whose responsibility it was to remediate infrastructural- related issues:

*For me, walking down some of the pathways that are completely washed out... and seeing them unrepaired, and no sign as to when things would be addressed made me think 'Oh the council really has not capacity to deal with this... and they're kind of grasping at straws as to how they can make this right but they can't replace this washed away path and five metre hole in the ground'... So people that might be disenfranchised or lose faith, would lose that faster. (Community stakeholder)*

## 4. Roles of organisations in supporting recovery needs

This section provides an overview of the key areas and the nature of the recovery work undertaken by community stakeholders.

As highlighted earlier in the report, a diverse array of organisations and individuals came together to address the emerging needs of the community in the aftermath of the Anniversary Weekend flooding. Some of these actors have continued their work to meet the ongoing needs of the community. While they were generally unable to quantify the level of support provided in recovery efforts, most indicated that it had increased their usual level of work or support provided to the community. One interviewee noted that they were not recording data relating to this mahi as they were not funded for it and that it was difficult to “put a number on it” given the nature of the work involved (e.g. trust-building within the community).

Interviewees highlighted challenges in undertaking this recovery work. The level of resources to support the work was noted, with some organisations working outside the scope of their funding or on a voluntary basis. Meeting the increased level of demand within existing frameworks was a further challenge, as was a lack of options to which to refer impacted families. The absence of a cohesive plan to address recovery needs was also discussed. Comments included:

*I don't want to complain because at least our staff still get paid, but people like [organisation name], they don't get paid. They volunteer. It's a big ask, even for the community to do it, to be honest. (Community stakeholder)*

*We've tried to access funding through things like MSD for different projects and they can be pretty demanding as to what we have to do, so we haven't been able to qualify for them. Obviously, funding is an issue for everyone right now and philanthropic trusts and all of that, there's less of that support available. (Community stakeholder)*

### Relationships and collaborations

Interviewees reported engaging with a range of entities to support their recovery related work. This included working with Kāinga Ora and MSD to support residents to access housing and financial support entitlements. A few groups reported having representatives visit their premises to share information and meet with community members. Some have collaborated with local churches, and received assistance from philanthropic organisations and food resource providers which has supported their distribution of food parcels and other basic needs items to their communities. Engagement with the health sector, including counselling services, was also noted.

#### Auckland Council

Interactions with Auckland Council that were discussed in the research mainly related to advocacy work, where stakeholders have supported community members to navigate and resolve issues related to infrastructure, housing damage categorisation, and the removal of rubbish and debris. Stakeholders often described these experiences as frustrating. While there was some acknowledgment that systems are stretched, long wait times and a lack of clarity regarding the responsibility of the various Council entities responsible for infrastructure posed significant challenges. These are discussed in more detail in section 5 (Future needs and priorities). Some stakeholders are bypassing conventional channels and elevating issues to councillors, including drawing on existing relationships to have residents' recovery needs met.

Collaborations with Auckland Council were noted by a few interviewees and a small number of stakeholders reported engagements with the Recovery Office. Those who talked about interactions at this level were working in governmental agency roles and they were generally described as positive and useful. There was some awareness of the navigation role within the Recovery Office:

*There was a lot of confusion out there with community regarding the stickers and thank goodness they have since had a couple of community hui about how that system works and just and then this new system that they've got with regards to navigators. So there is now a platform for the community to, if they have questions that they now can reach out to the Council. I mean it took a little while but that seems to be working. (Community stakeholder)*

Some stakeholders working at the grassroots level sought more engagement from the Council, including leading and involving them in recovery planning.

*[I'd like] for us like just to be included in that conversation because there's no conversation happening. I haven't seen anything to say like please come to us, talk about recovery or please communicate together... [it's about] leadership. (Community Stakeholder)*

## Organisational roles

This section provides an overview of the key roles undertaken by community stakeholders in meeting the recovery needs of affected residents in the Puketāpapa/Albert Eden area.

### Connector role

Findings from the research reveal that many organisations are actively engaged in sharing information and facilitating connections for community members to access the services and support required for their specific recovery needs.

While some residents proactively approach organisations seeking assistance, others have been less forthcoming. Some stakeholders emphasised the importance of identifying individuals with hidden needs, potentially stemming from shyness to ask for help or a lack of awareness regarding available support. To address this, they have been actively working to identify residents in need of ongoing recovery assistance. Similar to the immediate response efforts, door-to-door outreach has proven effective in identifying individuals who may not have reached out for support:

*The ones we had gone to and helped with food and moving. We went back to them. We just made sure after six months how are they are doing and what needs are there... so we find anyone who's fallen through the cracks as well and I think two people, although they didn't say, appeared to need some social and mental support. (Community stakeholder)*

Community leaders have also been instrumental in sharing information through online platforms and reaching out to the community to build awareness of available assistance and support services.

*How do we reach out to them? How do we get them to go somewhere? All I've been able to do is make sure that keeping the wick alive to say there's help out there... even through my social media, anything I can actually share to say, "Just in case you missed this." (Community stakeholder)*

Community stakeholders have been actively linking affected residents with a wide range of support services and government agencies. For instance, they assist residents in registering with MSD,

especially those facing language barriers or newcomers with limited knowledge of the available systems. Additionally, these organisations support affected residents in accessing resources like food parcels, mental health support, and assistance with insurance claims. Some organisations provide letters to support applications for assistance.

*We help to pass on information about where people can get help if they have housing issues. We did a few of them. We also helped them to register to the Ministry for Social Development so that they know who needs support or including if they need food parcel.*  
(Community stakeholder)

Some stakeholders are actively advocating for families, particularly in their engagement with Auckland Council, concerning issues such as land stability and property categorisation.

### Providing space to socialise, gather and connect

Community stakeholders have established spaces that offer opportunities for impacted residents to gather, connect, and find emotional support. Interviewees described these as providing “*relaxation and connection*”, with groups operating out of their facilities allowing people to come together and share their experiences with others who have endured similar hardships:

*Some of the immediate impact that I saw was some of the [group] ladies that we have whose houses got flooded... it wasn't until they came back and started gathering with their colleagues that it came out in the wash. And these are mothers that look after households. They carry that burden, and they don't acknowledge that until they're in a different setting. They're always trying to be the rock for their families. I saw that here and I thought wow.*  
(Community stakeholder)

Some stakeholders noted that their groups and activities provided important opportunities for those living in crowded or challenging conditions, such as emergency housing, to leave their home environment and spend time with their children in a comfortable and supportive setting.

### Community events

In addition to providing gathering spaces, some organisations are offering community events, as a way of developing opportunities for connection and “*bringing community together*”. Stakeholders had received feedback that existing events had been particularly valuable for fostering connections for those experiencing loneliness, isolation and disruption. This includes new initiatives involving meals and other activities to strengthen social bonds:

*We're trying to build community here with all the new housing, every Tuesday afternoon down at the local reserve that just backs on to our field, we have barbecues, we have games there, so the families can come in, they get fed, they can have fun together. We've just started that up in the last few weeks and we will continue it.* (Community stakeholder)

### Meeting basic needs

Many community stakeholders engaged in recovery support continue to meet the basic needs of impacted residents. Support provided includes provision of food, hygiene and personal care items, and distribution of household goods.

Addressing food insecurity is a key aspect of this work, with interviewees providing food parcels, maintaining neighbourhood Pātaka Kai and offering hot meals to those remaining in emergency accommodation. An increase in the need for food support post-flood was noted by many, and

remains a strong need, although organisations acknowledge that they cannot definitively attribute the increased demand to ongoing recovery needs.

*So food was the one biggest need that we had, whether it was to do with flooding or not, we don't judge, they just came and took it away. We were getting about between 10 to 20 people a week [until we ceased provision two weeks ago]. (Community stakeholder)*

### Counselling/emotional support

Community organisations are providing both formal and informal psychological support to address the ongoing mental health impacts of the flooding. While some are offering counselling services directly, others have supported families financially to facilitate access to this support. Additionally, stakeholders are taking on informal pastoral care roles, which includes listening to the experiences and challenges shared by impacted residents and providing reassurance. Some noted the scarcity of wellbeing supports and the need to plug gaps as best they can:

*There's just more of it [need] and... we do support our families and help them to navigate through but we don't really have the resources and sometimes we don't have the places to navigate them to. So we end up doing a lot of the conversations [ourselves] ... with parents, and not necessarily about teaching and learning. (Community stakeholder)*

### Financial support

There were a small number of examples provided where organisations were providing financial support to local residents as part of their recovery efforts. This included the provision of direct resources such as gift cards for shopping, as well as broader assistance such as budgeting advice and advocacy for debt assessment.

### Engagement in future planning efforts

Stakeholders are contributing to the recovery process by participating in community planning and preparedness efforts for potential future adverse weather events. Many reported engaging in the development of a response plan being led out of the local MP's office, with the group involved in this comprising a broad range of local people that made "a difference on the ground" in the community-led response earlier in the year. Other reported initiatives to increase preparedness capability, such as the development of databases which record organisational details and capabilities, and fostering community networks, are opportunities to build on the strengths of the community-led response.

## 5. Future needs and priorities

This section offers insights into the perspective of community stakeholders regarding the requirements for sustaining recovery within the Puketāpapa/Albert Eden area, including Auckland Council's role within this.

### Auckland Council connecting with affected communities

#### Responsive and more joined up systems

The research identified a range of perspectives on the role of Auckland Council in continuing to support recovery. Interviewees frequently emphasised the importance of responsiveness, with a common thread being that the effectiveness of leaders in meeting the recovery needs of their communities relies heavily on the functionality of local government systems.

*When people are there, crying and wanting to help, we have that for a response, but for a recovery, it's a lot, it is out of our hands. So we... [need] more responsive, timely responses from the agencies or the Council or whatever. Be more responsive and don't be reactive, be proactive. (Community stakeholder)*

Stakeholders highlighted the need for more efficient and unified processes, particularly when it comes to addressing stormwater and infrastructure issues that are impacting residents' homes. They spoke about the difficulties faced by residents in navigating Auckland Council's complex systems. In particular, they noted the challenges they face as advocates with understanding the system themselves, and stressed that achieving resolution with limited knowledge or language barriers was a formidable process:

*Thinking about our people who have English as a second language, trying to have the support by finding the right people... I don't think all of our families would [be able to]. They wouldn't know what to do or where to go. (Community stakeholder)*

The complexity resolving issues spanning various council entities was a source of frustration. Examples provided included 'tickets' passed from one entity to another or closed without explanation. Stakeholders called for processes to be streamlined to reduce barriers, and the adoption of a more collaborative approach across Council entities:

*What we hear [is]...It's impossible to get through to anyone to say who is responsible. (Community stakeholder)*

*For me the quandary is about the stormwater and what is it? Watercare and Healthy Waters, above and below, can you not work together?... I want to go to one person, and they can tick it off everything, but it is basically fobbing off. Don't fob me off is what we heard a lot. (Community stakeholder)*

#### Communication and information flows

Stakeholders expressed a strong desire for a two-way flow of information, advocating for the Council to act as "open ears for the community". They emphasised the need for consultation amongst affected residents to gain a deeper understanding of community needs, with one suggestion for council staff to undertake in-person visits across the region to ensure that all ongoing recovery needs are identified and appropriately responded to:

*... like in the Census... go and visit every house in Puketāpapa over the next three months and make sure they're okay and we can identify the ones that we need to go back to again. And have a little team of support, maybe psychologists or social workers who they then can straight away be referred to and... do another follow up in three months and another one in six months with those that are needing help that we've identified who have fallen through the cracks. (Community stakeholder)*

There was concern expressed that inadequate communication from Council is exacerbating stress and insecurity, and that some people in desperate situations “are not getting the answers they need”. Stakeholders therefore wished to see the Council adopt a more proactive approach to communications, with frequent and ongoing communication seen as essential, especially for individuals awaiting decisions relating to their homes. Additionally, some stakeholders stressed that the Council has a role in reassuring residents and highlighting available supports and remedial efforts, particularly in neighbourhoods like Puketāpapa that suffered significant damage:

*People still get this post rain anxiety and so I think there's... [a need for] a lot more either information sharing about like this is once in a blue moon, this is how we're looking to remediate it or it's hey we're here in case this were to happen again, so people know there is this sort of safety net. (Community stakeholder)*

### **Relational approach**

Stakeholders value and desire a more connected, “plugged in” and “immersed” approach from Council representatives, emphasising their presence on the ground in communities. Information sessions and community engagement events were suggested to provide information and support. One stakeholder saw the introduction of Navigators as a positive step in assisting those with ongoing recovery needs. Other comments included:

*I know councillors that I could just ring and that's fine but not everybody does. I think being there on the ground is really important. (Community stakeholder)*

*Community pop-up information, like a gazebo in a park... lots and for quite a long time. How to do insurance claims, all those sorts of civic things. Are you in need? What you do about that need. Just all the information people are asking for. (Community stakeholder)*

### **Supporting community organisations and residents**

Interviewees highlighted the key role they are playing in meeting the ongoing needs of impacted community members, and how their unique skills and relationships enable them to engage in this important work. Some wished to see council sufficiently recognise, value and resource their organisation to enable it to continue to carry out their roles.

*I would say that recovery from severe events earlier this year in our particular neighbourhood is mostly about ongoing emotional support and resilience. That is only possible through our small team having the capacity to be present in the community day-in day-out. So Auckland Council continuing to invest [in] and value community-led organisations like ours is the way this recovery happens. (Community stakeholder)*

One interviewee suggested that the value of recovery grants offered by council could be increased in recognition of the level of financial pressure that residents were facing.



## Infrastructure and planning

Frustrations regarding the slow speed at which Auckland Council is dealing with infrastructure issues was seen to be exacerbating stress and tension within communities and undermining trust in the organisation:

*Things aren't moving fast enough and frustration's building, so they start to accuse and call names and they start to slang. They don't want to know the Council anymore because they don't do anything, that's starting to happen now. (Community stakeholder)*

Interviewees wanted to see Auckland Council take a more proactive approach to infrastructure assessment, repair, and maintenance, to mitigate for future damage in impacted communities. Stormwater systems were a particular focus. Stakeholders also sought greater responsiveness when issues regarding public infrastructure and spaces (such as rubbish remaining in waterways) are logged, with resolution of these issues seen as important for restoring normalcy.

*That carpark was absolutely flooded, and it was community members who cleared the drains out so the water could flow off. Last week when it rained a little bit, it was flooded again. There's no effort to clean the drains and to keep them cleaned... we've logged so many jobs and no one turns up. (Community stakeholder)*

Interviewees also wished to see the Council undertake more active engagement with communities regarding the identification of natural hazards and preparedness planning.

## Longer-term concerns regarding local area risks

Longer term concerns expressed by interviewees when considering local area risks are summarised in [Table 3](#) below.

**Table 3: Long term concerns**

Concern	Description	Comment
Overall safety of the area	The weather events in January and February took many in the community by surprise and highlighted previously unknown risks. This has resulted in concerns regarding the overall safety of the area longer term, particularly given the perceived risk of more frequent and extreme weather events in the future.	<i>There are longer term concerns that Mt Roskill was once upon a time a place where people came to and thrived but now there's a lot of risks in the area. ... You're always with that mindset of what's going to happen if we get impacted by the flood again. (Community stakeholder)</i>
Community preparedness for future weather events	This included preparedness amongst both residents and service providers. Some interviewees were concerned that there was a lack of readiness and capacity to contend with potential adverse events in the future.	<i>Thinking into the future, when you see something massively explode at once, all of a sudden the workload would increase and you need to provide a whole lot of extra support. What comes to mind for me is 'how do we make sure we've got skilled people on deck with that capacity to do that straight away?'. (Community stakeholder)</i>

Infrastructure	This included concerns regarding the capability of systems (e.g. stormwater, drainage) to withstand future adverse weather events.	<i>Drains not being maintained and being blocked up. I mean that's what we've been told anyway in Auckland, that infrastructure breakdown is our biggest risk. (Community stakeholder)</i>
Redevelopment and intensification	There was anxiety expressed in relation to redevelopment and housing intensification, with a perception that this facilitated flooding in the area.	<i>We do want homes, but I think we need to be sensible how we make these homes and how we just put people into places. Because we know that flood plains flood. So to build on these flood plains is going to cause an issue. (Community stakeholder)</i>
Natural environment	Concerns regarding long term risks to the natural environment were expressed by some. These mostly related to the awa in the area, and the potential for future flooding or contamination.	<i>Another one [long term concern] is probably our creeks overflowing with black water, contaminated. (Community stakeholder)</i>

## 6. Conclusion

The findings from this research study, and a parallel study of resilience planning in Puketāpapa, have identified the devastating impact of the adverse weather events, particularly the January flooding, on the Puketāpapa community. This includes both impacts on the physical environment and residents' properties and household items, as well as the associated mental health and psychological effects experienced as a result.

There is little doubt that these impacts would have been significantly worse without the rapid mobilisation of a broad range of Puketāpapa community leaders and networks to support those affected, with the immediate response incorporating a vast array of support and services. This was despite the lack of a coherent plan in place prior to the events. The strong and well-established pre-existing connections and the generosity of Puketāpapa residents and businesses played a key role in facilitating the community-led approach.

These individuals and organisations have continued to play a role in the recovery phase, often without additional funding to support this work. This has ranged from working with individual families and community members to meet ongoing needs, through to strategic planning for potential future adverse events. A key aspect of this work has been the adoption of a connector role – linking impacted residents with a wide range of services and supports. Community stakeholders have also engaged in advocacy work with Auckland Council, as people struggle to navigate complex systems.

The wide-ranging community needs identified in this research highlight that some nine months on, Puketāpapa residents are still impacted by the weather events. Feedback also indicates that – in some cases – needs may be building, either due to a lack of resolution of pressing issues or because of their interlinked nature. For example, the emotional toll of unresolved insurance claims is impacting on mental health which in turn is affecting family relationships.

The likelihood that the extent of needs is not currently known indicates a requirement for further work to continuously monitor the needs of the Puketāpapa community. Findings from the research indicate that regular outreach in critically affected areas, and/or ongoing connection with community leadership, may play a useful role in this.

There are indications that affected residents are encountering barriers in accessing support from Auckland Council, including a lack of awareness of available services and assistance. The Recovery Office's Navigator service, which provides one-on-one support and assistance, has the potential to meet many of the needs identified in the research, including access to a broad range of support and information, assistance with insurance advice, housing support, and financial help. However, further work is required to promote awareness of this service and address potential barriers for community members to access it. Ensuring that it is accessible for members of migrant communities living in Puketāpapa, and others who face language barriers, will be important.

The introduction of a wellbeing lead within the Recovery Office has the potential to play an important function regarding the ongoing mental health needs for residents still impacted by the events. Valuing the role that community organisations have played in both the response and recovery work is also important and may be demonstrated by increased engagement with these stakeholders, the provision of sufficient resourcing to carry out the work, and ensuring that the health and wellbeing of those involved is protected.