

**Lessons
from the
2023
recovery:
summary**



June 2026



Recovery from the 2023 storms

2023

Weather events



Auckland Anniversary Storms

Ex-Tropical Cyclone | 27 January – 1 February 2023
286 mm rainfall



Cyclone Gabrielle

Severe Tropical Cyclone | 13-14 February 2023
248mm+ rainfall and high winds

Impacts



floods and landslides



4500+ households needed assistance



2000+ roading slips



720 parks and community facilities damaged

Response



Local and national states of emergency declared



7000 rapid building assessments



\$2.47 billion insurance claims



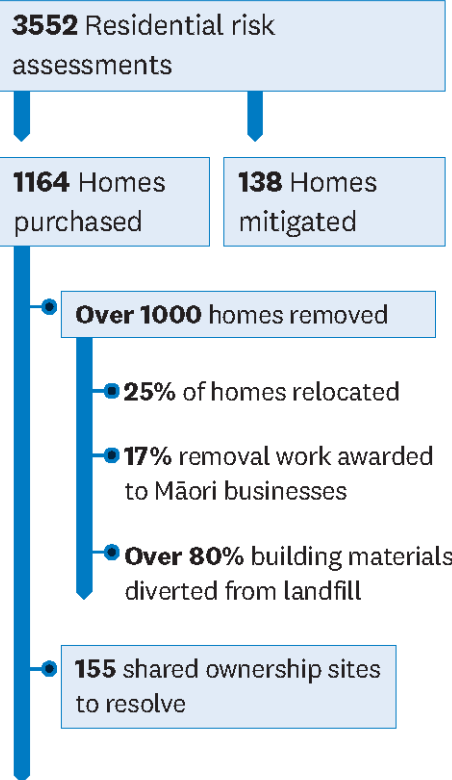
40,000 Civil Defence Payments (\$25.6m)

Recovery activities

People

- 900+ Whānau in temporary accommodation
- \$5.5m Rates relief for uninhabitable homes
- 2000+ Whānau supported by Storm Recovery Navigators
- 14 partner organisations delivering navigation services
- \$8.3m total community grants
- 26 communities and 10 iwi involved in local recovery planning
- 33 resident recovery groups supported
- 4000+ Business support grants

Homes



Infrastructure

- 4 Blue-green / flood resilience projects
- 797 Roothing projects
- 222 Water supply projects
- 1200+ Parks and community facilities projects
- Increased maintenance and hotspot monitoring
- 50+ Intolerable risk to life housing situations mitigated
- 500+ Homes and businesses protected from frequent flood risk



Recovery legacy

More resilient and better connected communities

Permanent removal of risk on 1164 properties

Storm affected land repurposed safely for service use, redevelopment, green space, flood resilience

Flood resilient waterways and communities

More resilient infrastructure

Improved public amenity

Improved recovery preparedness in Auckland Council and delivery partners

Lessons from the 2023 recovery: summary

Introduction

The Auckland Anniversary Weekend floods (27 January – 1 February 2023) and Cyclone Gabrielle (13 – 14 February 2023) triggered Auckland's first large-scale recovery from a severe weather event. The Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Office ('the Recovery Office') operated for over three years, coordinating support for people and communities, housing, and infrastructure. Key functions included information and advice, infrastructure repair, wellbeing support, iwi partnerships, and community-led recovery. The scope and scale of recovery fundamentally changed mid-2023, with the government announcement of a support scheme for impacted residential properties and further funding for infrastructure repairs and resilience improvements.

For many impacted whānau, Recovery Office services helped provide clarity, direction, and the emotional and financial support needed to take their next steps. Iwi and community groups were funded to develop their own recovery plans, building the local connections and understanding needed for people to move forward together.

In some cases, the support we could provide within the scope of our programmes was simply not enough to meet whānau needs, due to the scale of impacts, the presence of pre-existing vulnerabilities, the challenges, uncertainties and delays involved in standing up brand new recovery services in the aftermath of the storms, and the limitations of the Crown- and council-designed schemes. This was a difficult reality for whānau and for staff who needed to balance the immediate needs of impacted whānau with the wider responsibilities of the public sector.

By the end of the programme in 2034, total recovery costs are expected to exceed \$2.5 billion, largely driven by helping people move out of harm's way, and infrastructure repair and resilience improvements. These activities will leave a legacy of improved resilience for parts of the Auckland region but have come at a significant cost.

Recovering from the 2023 severe weather events in Tāmaki Makaurau has exposed both strengths and gaps in regional and national recovery systems. While recovery delivered meaningful outcomes, systemic improvements are needed to ensure faster, more coordinated, and more resilient future recovery operations. Recovery needs to evolve from a reactive function – effectively redesigned after every severe weather event – into a proactive, integrated system capability that is ready to roll out when needed. Discussion in the reports highlights how pre-event resilience measures and better system preparedness could strengthen future recovery efforts. This matters not only for future recovery operations, but also for Auckland's broader resilience and adaptation efforts in an increasingly uncertain future.

About the reports

As we reach the end of our formal recovery period, it's important to reflect on what we have learned and apply those lessons at all levels. The Recovery Office has published two lessons reports: *Delivering Recovery* which offers recommendations for operational improvements, and *Unlocking Recovery* which identifies strategic opportunities to strengthen recovery preparedness in Auckland and nationally. A third report, *Together Auckland: Recovering from the 2023 Storms*, gives a complete account of the entire recovery effort – what was decided, how it was delivered, the impact on our people, and what the legacy of the storms will be for Tāmaki Makaurau.

The findings in these reports are drawn from debriefs and reviews with staff, delivery partners, and governance groups. Although we draw on some community surveys and communications, the views of impacted whānau or the wider community have not been systematically canvassed in this lessons process. Further work to gather these perspectives would add further valuable insight into the impacts of the 2023 storms and the effectiveness, costs and benefits of the recovery.

Auckland's recovery efforts centred on three main elements: people, homes, and infrastructure, so the reports are focused on these issues too. Future recoveries may centre on different aspects. Data in the reports provides the best information available as of 10 June 2026, noting that some recovery operations will continue for some time, and some financial information will change.

The reports, from the Group Recovery Manager, reflect Recovery Office experience and do not represent Auckland Council policy.

Delivering Recovery

Delivering Recovery sets out key **operational** lessons from the Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Office. It examines the conditions that make delivering a recovery operation effective and identifies a range of preparedness activities. The report identifies 54 recommendations and eight priority actions.

Understanding what makes recovery effective

After the storms, people were caught in severe and urgent situations and were seeking rapid relief. They wanted clarity about what support was available, who would provide it, and when it would arrive.

To respond, the Recovery Office needed to make and implement robust decisions, quickly. Operating in a high-pressured and uncertain environment required us to work outside business-as-usual, build whole new teams and processes within weeks rather than months or years, and have a level of confidence that decisions would deliver the intended outcomes.

The eight conditions identified in *Delivering Recovery* (see Figure 1) are the cross-cutting factors that underpinned our successes and – when they weren't present – hindered our delivery. The conditions are interdependent, and their achievement is likely to be variable over the course of a recovery operation.



Figure 1. *Delivering Recovery*: eight conditions for an effective recovery operation

A **clear purpose** helped us to define the scope of recovery operations and manage expectations. As implementation progressed, carefully documenting our activities supported consistent, defensible decision-making. Having a **high-trust mandate and leadership**, with direct reporting to the Chief Executive and Governing Body, helped to shorten decision cycles and enable faster delivery.

Central to all our efforts was a team of **capable people**, bringing skills, experience and – equally importantly – the disposition to work in the challenging recovery environment. Staff with knowledge of council processes were essential to smooth operations, while contingent staff provided flexibility to scale up and down as recovery needs evolved. Given the intensity of recovery work, active wellbeing support for staff, guided by our Kaimahi Ora Framework, was critical to retaining and looking after people. In future recoveries, this support needs to be extended to include elected members and delivery partners.

No single person or organisation holds all the expertise, authority, or resources required to coordinate a recovery. We intentionally developed **collaborative ways of working** to bring together technical, operational, financial, people-centred, and community-led perspectives. At a community level, where strong relationships with iwi, community organisations, and local leaders were already in place, engagement was faster, trust was higher, and support could be mobilised more quickly.

We relied on effective **situational awareness** to make good decisions. This depended on wide-reaching and robust data collection, and on being able to analyse and translate information into decision-ready intelligence. This was a challenge for the Recovery Office, particularly in the early phases. Local knowledge of impacted communities proved essential to understanding where recovery efforts needed to be targeted, and how best to engage with different groups.

After the 2023 storms, impacted people and communities looked to the council for **accessible information and support**. It was important that the Recovery Office got clear communications out quickly, using multiple channels to reach diverse audiences. Sometimes we didn't get it right and trust was eroded. Navigators and community convenors played a vital role, providing direct, trusted support and helping whānau and communities engage with complex recovery systems.

The 2023 recovery involved activities beyond Auckland Council’s usual business. In some cases, existing **enabling systems and processes** could be extended, with workarounds to manage the scale and pace of recovery activity. In others, entirely new systems were built from scratch, including a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.

Access to funding and flexible funding arrangements, including seed funding for recovery initiation and provision for funding local delivery partners, helped to manage the uncertainties of recovery, and to accelerate long-term resilience and risk reduction where possible. A recovery of the scale of 2023 effort is beyond the capacity of a local authority alone. Crown support is necessary, and the 2023 effort showed what this partnership can achieve.

Priority actions for recovery preparedness

Delivering Recovery identifies eight priority actions to prepare for recovery (see Figure 2). These focus on ensuring that Auckland Council is well-positioned to meet future recovery needs after natural disasters and other emergency events, with systems and processes in place before they are needed.



Figure 2. *Delivering recovery*: eight priority actions to prepare for recovery

Priority actions span four areas:

- **planning**, with development of an interim recovery activation plan and a longer-term Recovery Strategy, including mechanisms to activate seed funding
- **people**, growing a recovery-ready workforce across the council through training and capability-building
- **systems and processes**, ensuring business planning incorporates recovery-specific requirements
- **partners**, sustaining the relationships and capability with iwi, communities and recovery stakeholders, and developing a mana whenua engagement and partnership framework for recovery.

Unlocking recovery

Unlocking Recovery draws on observations from the 2023 Auckland recovery effort to identify **strategic opportunities** that will improve recovery preparedness for Auckland and nationally. It focuses on areas where our experience in Auckland’s recovery from severe storms, floods and landslides suggests possibilities for strategic and systemic improvements. Each recommendation is accompanied with a list of possible actions for further consideration.

The recommendations (see Figure 3) sit across the three focus areas of the 2023 recovery in Tāmaki Makaurau: people, homes, and infrastructure, and are organised in three groups:

- Risk reduction, readiness and resilience: the actions we can take to reduce the need for recovery and, once in recovery, how we can use the momentum of events to achieve long-term resilience improvements
- Recovery support: the actions our communities need after an event
- Roles and responsibilities: aligning the delivery of recovery with clear roles and responsibilities in a locally led, centrally supported model.

Twelve recommendations to unlock recovery

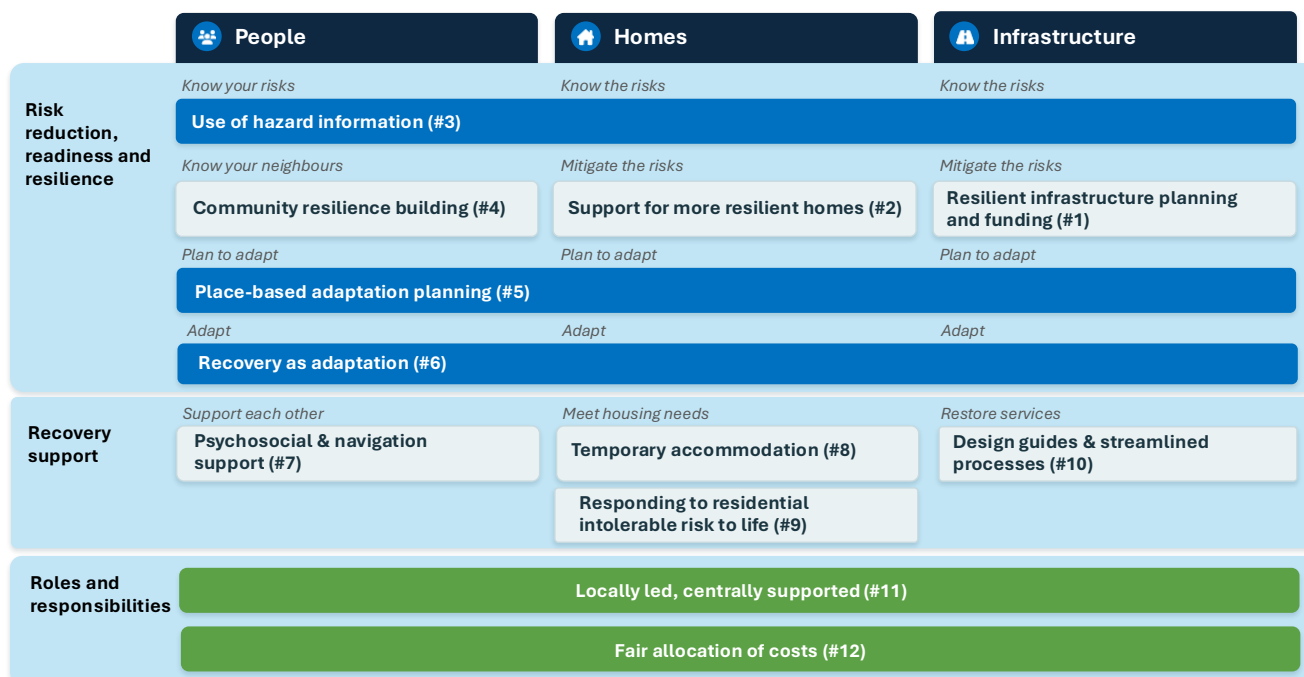


Figure 3. Recommendations in *Unlocking Recovery*

Risk reduction, readiness and resilience

Preventive measures could significantly reduce the extent and cost of recoveries, particularly where the effort relates to severe weather. This applies to **resilient infrastructure planning and funding**, where we have spent over \$600 million to deliver repairs after the 2023 storms. It also applies to the thousands of existing homes in natural hazard zones. We think it's worth applying the lessons from the Category 2P Risk Mitigation Scheme to explore the possibility of a **national Resilient Homes Scheme** to support people to make their homes more resilient to floods and landslides.

One of the fundamental improvements we recommend is to continue to improve and normalise the **use of natural hazard information**, including for tenants and property managers.

Investment in **iwi and community** is also investment in resilience and recovery preparedness. Where recovery investment supported local leadership, trusted relationships, community planning, Māori-led approaches and place-based coordination, it also built enduring capability to help communities recover and to plan for future disruption, adaptation and change.

Disasters can be catalysts for change. Recovery creates a rare window where funding, political attention, community motivation and public acceptance of change are often higher than under normal circumstances. This creates an opportunity – and a responsibility – to think beyond repair and to understand **recovery as adaptation**.

The actions delivered by the Recovery Office have had a tangible impact on the resilience and adaptability of some of our most vulnerable communities in areas where there is a history of repeated flooding and land instability. The 2023 recovery has been a reactive kind of adaptation, responding to damage and benefitting from the funding that became available from the Crown. Decisions were made consistently within the agreed recovery framework, however that framework did not have the benefit of being nested within larger, more long-term and systematic adaptation plans that need to be developed. This has resulted in a patchwork of actions, with a long tail of work to resolve the future ownership and management of storm affected land purchased by the council.

Future recovery operations will inevitably make adaptation decisions, and those decisions will be better, faster and fairer if **place-based adaptation pathways** are agreed before the next major event, rather than trying to resolve them under crisis conditions. A clear framework is needed to link community priorities with regional adaptation planning, infrastructure decisions, land-use planning and funding pathways.

Recovery support

Recovery required attention to both individual wellbeing and the wider social conditions that support people and communities to recover, including **psychosocial support, navigation support, temporary accommodation**, and long-term support for people to remove themselves from **residential situations of intolerable risk to life**. Temporary accommodation was a real challenge and needs review to be fit for purpose for Auckland's recovery needs.

With a lack of pre-defined roles and responsibilities, some initiatives had to be designed, funded and implemented while recovery was already underway. This created delays, uncertainty and inconsistency at a time when people were seeking clarity about what support would be available, who would provide it and how long it would take.

The categorisation schemes for homes with **intolerable risk to life** are a particular focus of *Unlocking Delivery* – even though the schemes may not be repeated, the need they responded to will remain. Insights from the 2023 schemes could help to inform whatever future measures are put in place.

The process to repair infrastructure and improve its resilience at the same time would benefit from pre-event planning, so that systems that are rolled out in recovery support asset managers to deliver projects rapidly and cost-effectively. This includes **design guidance and streamlined processes** for funding and delivering infrastructure.

Roles and responsibilities in recovery systems

The 2023 recovery showed that support for impacted people can be effectively delivered in a **locally led, centrally supported model**, but that the model could be improved. Unclear responsibilities at the start of recovery led to delays and coordination challenges. Stronger national recovery frameworks and clearer role definitions are required across government, local authorities, insurers, and communities.

Recovery costs are significant and unevenly distributed. Current systems do not provide clear guidance on cost-sharing. Future models need to take a long-term view and align a **fair allocation of funding** with responsibility, benefit, and ability to pay, involving government, councils, individuals, insurers, and financial institutions.

Next steps

The 2023 storms were an important call to action. The findings in *Delivering Recovery* and *Unlocking Recovery* provide a foundation for strengthening Auckland's recovery capability and broader resilience. The focus now should be on turning these lessons into practical changes that improve recovery preparedness ahead of future events and support long-term resilience, adaptation and equity.

The council has already improved capability in areas including hazard modelling, staff wellbeing, and community engagement. A recovery toolkit gathers together templates, tools and guidance for future recovery efforts. We now have a best practice data platform in place, data governance policy, and improved tools for data interpretation and communication.

A new Recovery Unit has been established within Auckland Emergency Management, tasked with ensuring the council is prepared to coordinate future recovery efforts. *Delivering Recovery* provides a basis for the unit to draw on, building recovery capabilities in the organisation and with delivery partners, and ensuring council systems and processes are able to meet recovery needs.

The recommendations in *Unlocking Recovery* are a little more systemic and complex and cannot be delivered by any single organisation. Auckland's recovery worked because people pulled together: the Crown and council unlocking resources, mana whenua leading in their rohe, and community organisations reaching people that formal systems could not. The same collaborative effort will be needed to prepare for what comes next.

Auckland has learned a great deal over these three years and is ready to put that experience to work alongside everyone else who has a part to play.

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