Planning New Zealand

# Planning system technology and data investment guidance for councils

This guidance will help councils decide whether to proceed with, defer or adjust planned investment in planning-related technology, data and information systems while national arrangements are being developed.

**Context**

The Government is investing in national digital and data foundations to support a simpler, faster and more consistent planning system for New Zealand. The scope, timing and delivery of future national services are still being developed, and further decisions will depend on the detailed business case and future Budget and Cabinet decisions.

This guidance builds on the advice provided to local government in May 2026 following Budget 2026. Councils should use it to maintain essential services, manage material risks and focus investment on work that is likely to remain useful as the future system develops.

Until there is greater certainty, councils should prioritise investments that strengthen core data, information and digital capabilities, maintain essential services and position their organisations to realise future benefits from national standards, shared services and coordinated digital infrastructure.

## What we know about timing

The Government has already begun investing in the first stages of this work through Budget 2026. Current investment is focused on foundational digital and data capabilities, including architecture, standards, information foundations and initial digital services. Future programme decisions, timing and investment will depend on the detailed business case, future Budget and Cabinet decisions and implementation planning.

New planning system tools will be introduced in stages, with officials working alongside local government to understand councils' needs as legislation is refined through late 2026. Current planning assumes councils will prepare first-generation regional spatial plans using their existing systems and tools. The national digital capabilities, including the e-plan viewer, are not expected to be ready for that round, so councils should plan delivery on that basis. A standardised, national digital planning system is expected from 2030.

The current timetable of activity can be found on the Planning New Zealand website under key milestones in the transition.

# What councils should do now

Until there is greater certainty about national digital and data arrangements, councils should:

1. maintain essential services and meet statutory obligations
2. manage material operational, security and resilience risks
3. prioritise investment that addresses a current need and is likely to remain useful under different future arrangements
4. avoid major upgrades or long-term commitments unless they are necessary.

# Questions to consider

Budget 2027 announcements in May 2027 are expected to provide greater clarity about future investment and the likely timing and phasing of implementation. In the meantime, councils can use the following questions to assess proposed investment.

- Is the investment essential to keep services operating or meet statutory obligations?
- Can the immediate risk be managed through an interim or lower-cost option?
- Is the investment likely to retain value under a range of potential future arrangements, or could it be duplicated, replaced or require significant rework?
- Can the decision be deferred without material unintended consequences? If work is paused, narrowed or deferred, could the funding be redirected to activities that strengthen core data, information or digital capability?
- Will this investment strengthen foundational capability that is likely to remain useful under future arrangements?

# Applying this approach

## Existing contracts and platforms

Where practical, extend existing contracts, licences or support arrangements rather than buying new systems. Only invest what is needed to maintain services and manage material risks. Avoid major upgrades or long-term commitments unless they are necessary.

## New investment and service change

Continue work needed to meet statutory obligations, maintain resilience or address essential service needs. Before progressing other investments, consider whether they should proceed now or be deferred until there is greater clarity about future

national arrangements. Where practical, redirect funding to activities that strengthen core data, information and digital capability.

### Legacy technology risks

Unsupported or ageing systems do not necessarily need to be replaced immediately. Consider whether support extensions, maintenance, security controls or limited upgrades can manage operational, resilience and security risks.

Replace a system only where this is necessary to maintain essential services, meet statutory obligations or manage material operational, security or resilience risks. Where replacement is necessary, favour options that preserve flexibility and minimise duplication or rework.

## Examples of investments likely to remain useful

Councils should continue activities that strengthen core data and digital capability. This includes improving the quality, accessibility and management of planning, consenting, environmental and spatial information needed to support the future planning system. These activities are likely to remain useful regardless of future decisions about national services, standards or implementation approaches and over time reduce costs and processing timeframes.

The examples below are indicative only. Councils remain responsible for their own investment decisions.

**Data and information foundations**

- improve the quality, completeness and consistency of data
- digitise, improve access to and strengthen the quality and management of planning, consenting, environmental and spatial information
- strengthen metadata, information management and data stewardship practices
- make information easier to find, access and reuse
- adopt existing national data standards where appropriate.

**Interoperability and technology foundations**

- improve information sharing and interoperability capability
- improve integration and data exchange between existing systems
- improve cyber security, resilience and business continuity capability
- address critical technology, security or operational risks
- manage legacy technology risks through targeted maintenance or remediation activities.

**Supporting future readiness**

- document existing data holdings, data quality and data gaps
- document key business processes and information flows
- identify legacy technology constraints and dependencies
- strengthen data governance and information management capability
- participate in sector engagement, readiness and capability-building activities.

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