

Cook Islands Government Public Sector Strategy 2026 - 2031

Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector



Government of the Cook Islands

Public Sector Strategy

2026-2031

A Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector

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Foreword | Message from the Prime Minister

The Cook Islands proudly commemorates 60 years of self-governance in 2025, reflecting on a journey defined by resilience, identity, and progress. Under the theme "*Kua kite au i toku turanga, e Avaiki toku -- I know who I am, I have a homeland*," this milestone is both a celebration and a reaffirmation of who we are as a people.

Over six decades, the Cook Islands has evolved from a fledgling self-governing nation to a confident ocean state with growing influence. Milestones such as the establishment of Marae Moana, the formalization of maritime boundaries, and the graduation to high-income status in 2020 reflect the nation's commitment to sustainable development and to our growing international personality.

Central to our journey to statehood has been the compass at the centre of our navigation – our culture, our *Peu Māori* and our language, *to tatou reo Māori*. We as Cook Islanders are taught to know where we come from, in order to know where we are going. This wisdom reminds us that our past is not a place we leave behind – it is the foundation we stand on.

In the early years of our development, we laid the groundwork for our modern economy with what limited resources were available to us at the time – investing in essential services like ports, roads, schools, and healthcare, whilst also leaning on the generous support of our development partners. As challenges arose, particularly during the 1990's, we responded with courage and reform, adapting and strengthening our public financial management systems and ensuring every dollar was used wisely. Though challenging, these were important lessons that have helped to ensure the Cook Islands now have some of the most robust and transparent public institutions, systems and processes in the region.

Today, the nation stands at a pivotal turning point. We have achieved sustainable debt levels, and are establishing a Sovereign Wealth Fund to safeguard future generations. Whilst tourism remains vital, economic diversification is actively underway—exploring the ocean economy, strengthening financial services, and expanding into new markets. This progress is driven by long-term vision, investment in people, and a commitment to our values, because strong public institutions are fundamental to our future development, stability, and resilience.

"We honour those who paved the way and look forward with belief in our people, our institutions, and our future. Let us walk forward as one nation—confident, united, and grounded in aro'a."

Kia manuia.

Hon. Mark Brown
Prime Minister of the Cook Islands
Minister Responsible for the Public Service

Foreword | Message from the Public Service Commissioner

Ten years ago, we set a bold vision: to build a Public Sector that remains relevant, responsive, and resilient. Today, as we mark 60 years of self-governance, that vision is more urgent than ever.

The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us that resilience isn't just a buzzword—it's a necessity. It's about designing and building systems that don't just survive shocks, but grow stronger because of them. It's about leadership that looks beyond short-term wins and focuses on lasting impact for generations to come.

We are a small nation with a steadfast spirit. Our journey of self-determination has been guided by service, unity, resourcefulness and resilience. These values are the backbone of our Public Sector—and the foundation of our national vision: Turanga Memeitaki -- Wellbeing for All.

The new **Cook Islands Public Sector Strategy** sets a powerful course moving forward. Our vision is clear: **A Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector**.

This means we need:

- Leadership that inspires—with integrity, empathy, and vision
- Service that delivers—honest, timely, relevant and high-quality
- Responsiveness that matters—meeting community needs efficiently
- Collaboration that empowers—uniting Agencies with purpose to collectively achieve outcomes that truly matter

We must meet the challenges of a fast-changing world with culturally grounded, innovative and sustainable solutions. That requires leaders who live our values—transparency, accountability, and excellence—and public servants who serve with pride and purpose.

As Public Service Commissioner, my mission is to ensure our Public Sector performs at its best. The 2023 Government Functional Review has made it clear: we must invest more in performance, resilience, and results. That means transparent and robust systems, clear structures, and resilient public servants who step up in the face of uncertainty.

Our economy, our environment, our communities—they all depend on a Public Sector that delivers real value. And that's exactly what we're building.

"Let's rise to the challenge. Let's lead with courage. Let's serve with aro'a. Together, we will build a Public Sector—and a nation—that is ready for the future."

Kia manuia.

Carl Hunter
Public Service Commissioner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY





Executive Summary

As the Cook Islands commemorates 60 years of self-governance in 2025, this Public Sector Strategy 2026-2031 sets a bold vision: "A Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector."

The Strategy responds to the Cook Islands Government Functional Review 2023 and aligns with the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+ (NSDA) vision of *Turanga Memeitaki—Wellbeing for All.* It applies to the 24 Public Service Agencies (14 Ministries and 10 Island Governments) overseen by the Public Service Commissioner, with recognition of the broader Public Sector ecosystem (Crown and Statutory Agencies).

Three Strategic Goals (The Vaka Analogy)

Using the *vaka* (voyaging canoe) as a metaphor, the Strategy establishes three interconnected goals that show how every part of the Public Sector must work together:

- **Transparent and Collaborative Public Sector** *(the oe/paddle - steering together)*: Central Agencies and all Public Sector entities must collaborate transparently to achieve common goals through open communication, coordinated planning, and collective accountability.
- **Innovative and Creative Employees** *(the kiato/connecting beam - providing strength and flexibility)*: Public servants provide the adaptability and problem-solving capacity the Public Sector needs through continuous learning, empowerment to improve processes, and celebration of innovation.
- **Responsive and Fit for Purpose Service Delivery** *(the ama/outrigger - providing stability)*: Services designed around user needs with efficient processes, timely delivery, and regular review to ensure relevance.

Seven Strategic Themes

The Strategy addresses seven priority areas:

- **Clarity in Statute** - strengthening legislative and policy foundations
- **Fit for Purpose Public Sector** - aligning structures, systems, and capabilities to national priorities
- **Efficiency** - promoting value for money and optimal use of resources
- **Employee Wellbeing** - supporting a healthy, motivated, and high-performing workforce
- **Digital Resilience** - leveraging technology to enhance service delivery and connectivity
- **Responsiveness and Communication** - fostering timely, accessible, and user-centered services
- **Transparency and Accountability** - building public trust through clear expectations and visible performance

Pa Enua Focus

The Strategy recognizes unique Pa Enua challenges including workforce retention, limited resources, geographic isolation, and multi-role responsibilities. Dedicated objectives address Pa Enua-specific needs for career development, improved connectivity, and enhanced service delivery.

Implementation and Monitoring

Implementation is coordinated by the Office of the Public Service Commissioner (OPSC) with support from Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM) and Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). Implementation of this Strategy will occur through Ministry and Agency Strategic Plans, annual Business Plans and performance frameworks. Each Ministry and Agency will align their operational planning with the Strategy's objectives, ensuring coordinated delivery across the Public Sector. Implementation will be phased over the Strategy's life, with a formal review within five years. The Strategy uses a simplified monitoring framework with seven key outcome indicators that measure overall success. Progress will be reviewed at mid-term (2029) and completion (2031).

1. BACKGROUND





1. Background

1.1 Rationale

The Cook Islands Public Sector Strategy 2026-2031 operates in a rapidly changing environment. It responds to stakeholder feedback and shifts in our operating environment. This Strategy is being developed for three key reasons:

- The previous Public Sector Strategy (2016-2025) has reached the end of its term and requires review and renewal.
- Significant developments including the COVID-19 pandemic, graduation to high-income status, adoption of the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+, and other national policy milestones — including the Economic Development Strategy 2030, the National Employment Policy 2025-2030, and the National Digital Strategy 2024-2030 require an updated strategic approach.
- The 2023 Cook Islands Government Functional Review made comprehensive recommendations requiring strategic response to improve effectiveness and efficiency.

This revised Strategy has been shaped by insights from these national frameworks and informed by extensive consultation with Government and non-government Agencies, development partners, and community representatives across Rarotonga, the Pa Enua, and New Zealand.

The Cook Islands Government Functional Review 2023 identified critical areas requiring reform: coordination challenges and fragmented legislative frameworks creating ambiguity about roles and responsibilities; duplicated functions across Agencies limiting efficiencies; inconsistent approaches to service delivery; and insufficient transparency and accountability mechanisms. These challenges are compounded by resource constraints, a small population base, and competition for skilled workers in an open labour market with New Zealand and Australia.

This Strategy takes a whole-of-Government approach, recognizing that achieving national development goals requires genuine partnership between Government Ministries and stakeholders across civil society, traditional leadership, and communities. It provides a clear roadmap for building a Public Sector that is people-centred, performance driven, and future ready, capable of delivering quality services that meet the evolving needs and expectations of the public we serve.

1.2 Current State of the Public Sector

For the purpose of this Strategy, the Public Sector includes any Government department, Crown or Statutory Agency that is wholly owned or controlled by the Crown. The Cook Islands Public Sector currently comprises: twenty-four Public Service Agencies (overseen by the Public Service Commissioner) and thirteen Crown and Statutory Agencies. The Cook Islands Public Sector employs approximately 2,450 people across diverse entities. Key characteristics – taken from HRMIS (March 2025) include:

- Public Service Ministries employ 64% female and 36% male staff, while Island Governments employ 69% male and 31% female staff.
- The 50-60 years age group has highest representation, indicating need for succession planning and knowledge transfer.
- Most employees earn between $10,000-$50,000 annually; Island Governments have highest proportion of lower-income earners (64% earn up to $10,000), likely reflecting part-time or casual work.
- The Public Sector employs approximately 32% of the total workforce and Government spending represents more than 40% of GDP, making Public Sector performance critical to national development.

1.3 Consultation Process

The Strategy was developed through comprehensive consultations from October 2024 to April 2025, including:

- Over 30 consultation sessions across Rarotonga, Pa Enua, and New Zealand.
- Engagement with Parliament, 14 Ministries, Island Governments, Statutory Agencies, SOEs, NGOs, private sector, and development partners.
- Special focus on young public servants and Pa Enua voices through dedicated visits to Aitutaki and Mangaia.
- Use of multiple modalities: community meetings, targeted consultations, focus groups, written submissions, and media engagement.

Key themes emerging from consultations included (and expanded on further below): the need for clearer legislative frameworks and Agency mandates; strengthening digital infrastructure and service delivery, particularly in the Pa Enua; improving workforce retention and development opportunities; and enhancing coordination across Government to reduce duplication and improve service quality. These themes directly inform the Strategy's seven strategic priorities.

- Urgent need for legislative clarity and adjust OPSC jurisdiction;
- Employee wellbeing through remuneration equity and career development;
- Improved collaboration through shared services;
- Better efficiency and prioritization; digital transformation with centralized ICT services and digital-by-default service delivery;
- Enhanced transparency and accountability through clear performance frameworks and public reporting;
- Pa Enua-specific improvements including greater involvement in planning processes, recognition of multi-role responsibilities, and youth retention strategies; and
- The importance of incorporating Cook Islands culture and language into Public Service operations.

The consultations served multiple purposes:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of the current Strategy against criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability;
- Identifying emerging priorities and challenges including the impact of COVID-19, implementation of the National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+, and recommendations from the 2023 Functional Review;
- Gathering stakeholder input on how CIGOV could improve services in areas of efficiency, resilience, transparency and accountability, collaboration, responsiveness, communication, employee wellbeing, and digital resilience;
- Ensuring Pa Enua-specific challenges were understood and addressed; and
- Building ownership and commitment to the implementation of the new Strategy.

2. THE PUBLIC SECTOR STRATEGY





2. The Public Sector Strategy

2.1 Strategy Vision

The Strategy's Vision defines the future state of the Cook Islands Public Sector and how it aspires to be perceived by its stakeholders. It reflects the values, capabilities, and culture that will guide public service delivery over the next decade.

"A Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector."

2.2 Strategy Principles

This Vision embodies four core aspirations:

- **Well-Led**: Public Sector leaders are competent, ethical, empathetic, and visionary. They inspire confidence, empower their teams, and drive excellence in service delivery.
- **Trusted**: The Public Sector is known for its integrity, transparency, and accountability. It consistently delivers high-quality services that meet the needs and expectations of the people.
- **Responsive**: Government services are timely, efficient, and tailored to the evolving needs of communities across Rarotonga and the Pa Enua.
- **Collaborative**: Agencies work together through collective leadership, shared planning, and coordinated resourcing to achieve common goals and deliver meaningful outcomes for the Cook Islands.

These principles align with the Public Service values of: OPSC is guided by the Public Service values enshrined in Section 20 of the Public Service Act 2009:

- *Honesty* – Acting honestly and abiding by the law
- *Respect* – Treating the people the Government of the Cook Islands, and colleagues with courtesy and respect
- *Impartiality* – Providing free and frank advice without fear or favour and making decisions on their merits
- *Accountability* – Taking responsibility for actions and explaining decisions
- *Transparency* – Making decisions in an open way
- Commitment to *Service* – Serving the people well through faithful service to Government
- *Efficiency and Effectiveness* – Achieving good results economically

These values are organized in three tiers that build progressively:

- Foundational values – honesty and respect - establish personal character.
- Conduct values – impartiality, transparency and accountability - guide professional behaviour.
- Delivery values – quality service delivered effectively and efficiently - focus on service results.

STRATEGIC GOALS – THE VAKA ANALOGY





2.3 Strategic Goals -- The Vaka Analogy

The *vaka* (traditional voyaging canoe) serves as a powerful metaphor for how the Cook Islands Public Sector works together to serve our people. Just as every part of a *vaka* must function in harmony for a successful voyage, every part of the Public Sector must work together to achieve our Vision.

To achieve our Vision of a "**Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive, and Collaborative Public Sector**", the Strategy has three interconnected goals based on the *vaka* concept:

Goal 1: Transparent and Collaborative Public Sector

The oe (paddle) -- steering together

Just as paddlers must work in unison to guide the *vaka*, Central Agencies and all Public Sector entities must collaborate transparently to achieve common goals. This requires:

- Open communication and information sharing across Agencies
- Coordinated planning and decision-making
- Collective accountability for outcomes
- Trust and mutual support

Goal 2: Innovative and Creative Employees

The kiato (connecting beam) -- providing strength and flexibility

The *kiato* connects the hull to the outrigger, providing both strength and flexibility. Similarly, innovative and creative employees provide the adaptability and problem-solving capacity the Public Sector needs to navigate changing circumstances. This requires:

- A culture that encourages new ideas and calculated balancing of risk
- Continuous learning and professional development
- Empowerment to improve processes and services
- Recognition and celebration of innovation

Goal 3: Responsive and Fit for Purpose Service Delivery

The ama (outrigger) -- providing stability and efficiency

The *ama* provides stability, keeping the *vaka* upright and on course even in rough waters. Similarly, responsive and fit-for-purpose services provide the stability our communities need. This requires:

- Services designed around user needs
- Efficient processes and systems
- Timely and accessible delivery
- Regular review and adaptation to ensure relevance

CORE THEMES







2.4 Core Themes

The Strategy is structured around seven thematic areas that reflect the evolving needs and aspirations of the Cook Islands Public Sector:

- **Clarity in Statute** -- Strengthening legislative and policy foundations to support effective governance
- **Fit-for-Purpose Public Sector** -- Ensuring structures, systems, and capabilities are aligned to national priorities
- **Efficiency** -- Promoting value for money and optimal use of resources
- **Employee Wellbeing** -- Supporting a healthy, motivated, and high-performing workforce
- **Digital Resilience** -- Leveraging technology to enhance service delivery and connectivity
- **Responsiveness and Communication** -- Fostering timely, accessible, and user-centered services
- **Transparency and Accountability** -- Building public trust through clear expectations and visible performance

2.5 Governance and Oversight

The Public Service Commissioner has overall accountability for the Strategy's implementation, supported by a Public Sector Strategy Sub-Committee. The Sub-Committee provides strategic oversight, monitors progress, and reports to Cabinet on implementation. Heads of Ministries and Agencies are accountable for implementing the Strategy through their Agency Strategic Plans and annual business plans. They will report on progress through existing Cabinet reporting processes and Agency performance frameworks, coordinated by OPSC, MFEM and OPM. This ensures the Strategy is embedded across Public Sector leadership and operations.

Governance Principles

The Strategy's governance approach is guided by the following principles:

- **Accountability and Leadership** – The Public Service Commissioner leads Strategy implementation with clear accountability to Cabinet and Parliament for outcomes. Heads of Ministries and Agencies are responsible for implementing the Strategy through their Agency strategic plans and annual business plans, reporting on progress through existing Cabinet reporting processes and Agency performance frameworks.
- **Collaborative Decision-Making** – Implementation decisions involve consultation across Central Agencies (OPSC, MFEM, OPM) and affected Ministries to ensure coordinated approaches and alignment with whole-of-Government priorities.
- **Inclusive Representation** – The governance structure ensures diverse perspectives inform Strategy implementation. Young professionals within the Public Sector with demonstrated capability will be provided opportunities for participation in relevant Government bodies, advisory committees, and decision-making structures. This ensures fresh perspectives inform policy development whilst developing the next generation of Public Sector leaders.

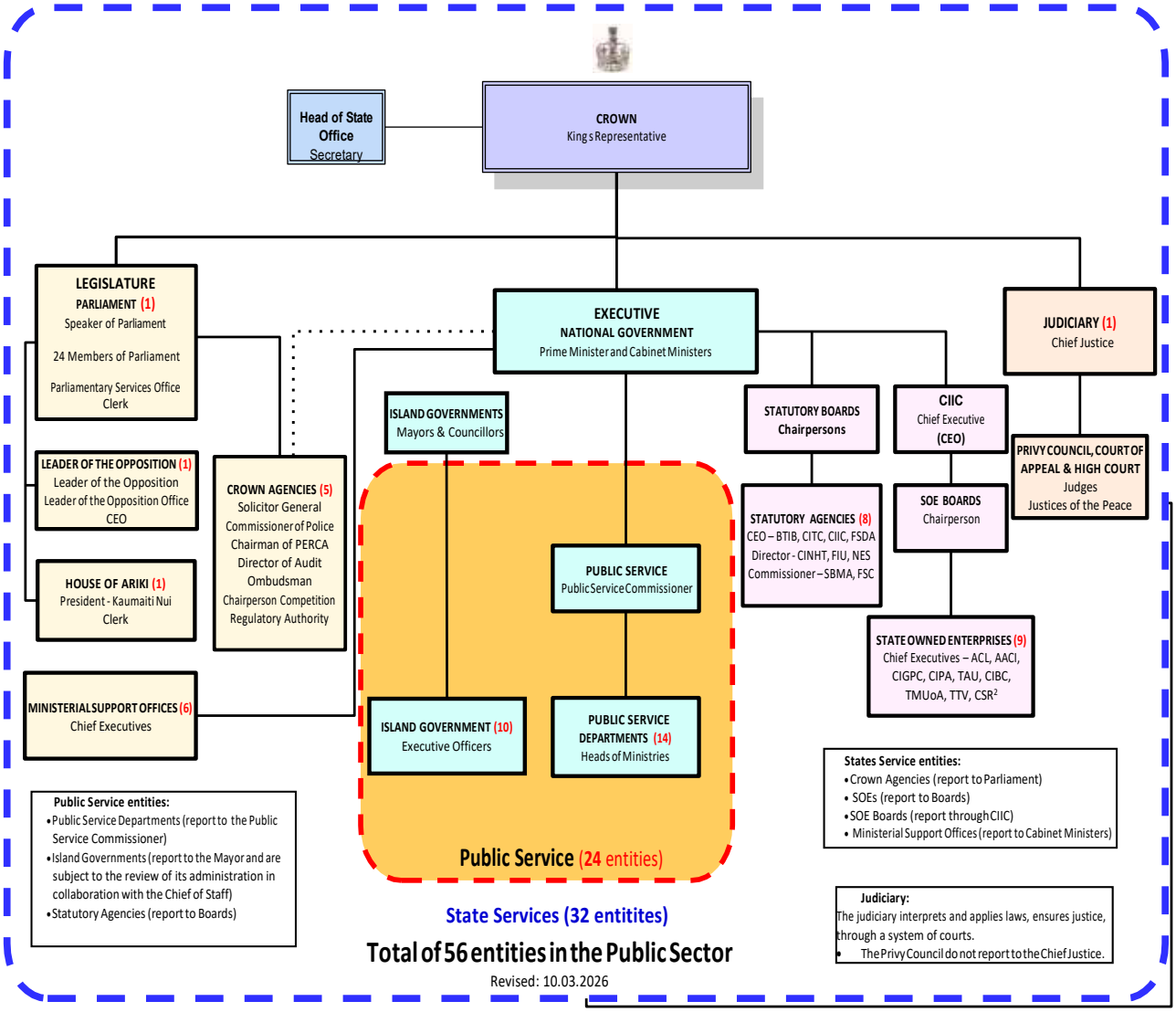
- **Transparency and Reporting** – Progress is regularly reported to Cabinet and made available to stakeholders through public reporting mechanisms, ensuring accountability for Strategy outcomes.
- **Adaptive Management** – The governance framework allows for responsive adjustments based on implementation experience, emerging priorities, and changing circumstances identified through regular monitoring and review.

Details of the governance structure, including Sub-Committee composition and responsibilities, are set out in Section 5.2.

2.6 Scope

This Strategy applies primarily to the 24 Public Service Agencies (14 Ministries and 10 Island Governments) under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commissioner. However, it recognizes the broader Public Sector ecosystem including Crown and Statutory Agencies [1] . The Strategy promotes collaboration across this ecosystem while respecting different governance arrangements (illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page).

Figure 1



[1] State Owned Enterprises (SOE), while shown in the Machinery of Government diagram to illustrate their reporting relationship to Executive Government via their Boards and Cabinet Minister, they are not within the scope of this Strategy as the PSC has no direct authority over their operations.

2.7 Pa Enua Considerations

The Pa Enua faces unique challenges, including geographic isolation, limited resources, workforce retention difficulties, and dual accountabilities. The Strategy includes dedicated Pa Enua objectives and actions recognizing these distinct circumstances while ensuring Pa Enua public servants benefit from Strategy initiatives.

3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES, OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES







3. Strategic Priorities, Objectives and Outcomes

This section details the specific objectives and outcomes for each of the seven strategic themes, along with priority actions for implementation.

3.1 Rarotonga Priorities

3.1.1 Clarity in Statute

Objective: Establish a well-defined statutory framework that provides clarity for the machinery of Government and the structure and function of the Public Sector.

Rationale:

The Functional Review and stakeholder consultations both identified urgent need to modernize the Public Service and State Sector legislative framework. The current legislation creates significant operational challenges including fragmented arrangements, coordination difficulties, ambiguous accountability, confusion in interpretation, and inconsistent application. The OPSC jurisdiction should cover the State Sector, not just the Public Service.

In response, the Strategy includes reviewing and updating the Public Service Act to establish clear authority, clarify Agency mandates and reporting relationships, reduce legal disputes, enable consistent standards, and support effective Public Sector performance. Additionally, shared service models for ICT, finance and HR will address duplication of corporate functions whilst ensuring sector-specific expertise is maintained where required.

It should be noted that statutory entities such as CIIC and State-Owned Enterprises (SOE) that are managed by SOE Boards are governed through independent boards remain outside PSC jurisdiction under current legislation. Any extension of PSC oversight to these entities would require legislative amendments.

Key Outcomes:

- Updated and cohesive legislative framework for Public Sector operations
- Clear roles, responsibilities, established organisation standards and accountabilities for all Public Sector entities
- Strengthened OPSC mandate and jurisdiction
- Reduced legal disputes and ambiguities

Priority Actions:

- Review and update the Public Service Act to reflect current and future needs
- Clarify OPSC jurisdiction to cover broader Public Sector where appropriate
- Align OPSC and Ombudsman jurisdictions to reduce overlap and gaps
- Develop clear guidelines on Public Sector governance arrangements

3.1.2 Fit for Purpose Public Sector

Objective: Ensure Public Sector structures, systems, and capabilities are aligned to national priorities and fit for purpose.

Rationale:

The Functional Review identified critical needs for better prioritization of activities and resources across Government, enhanced service delivery resilience through shared corporate functions, fit-for-purpose structures with clear mandates and reduced duplication and improved cross-Agency collaboration and coordination. Agencies need clarity about their core mandates, enhanced service delivery resilience, the ability to collaborate effectively on shared priorities, and access to quality corporate support functions without each maintaining duplicate capacity. The current fragmented structure results in inefficiencies, gaps in coordination, and suboptimal use of scarce resources.

As the Strategy is implemented, structural evolution may occur in several ways. For example, environmental protection functions currently distributed across multiple Agencies may become more integrated to strengthen joined-up policy and delivery. Similarly, routine citizen services such as licence renewals and permit applications will progressively become digital-by-default, reducing manual processing whilst maintaining accessibility for all communities.

Key Outcomes:

- Public Sector structures optimized for efficiency and effectiveness with clear, focused mandates
- Shared services delivering quality corporate functions (ICT, finance, HR, legal, communications and policy) across Government
- Reduced duplication and functional overlap between Agencies
- Strengthened whole-of-government planning and coordination on cross-cutting priorities (climate change, digital transformation, economic development)
- Improved cross-Agency collaboration enabling integrated service delivery

Priority Actions:

- Implement shared services for corporate functions (ICT, finance, HR, legal, communications and policy)
- Review and rationalize Agency mandates to reduce duplication and clarify core functions (as identified in the Functional Review)

- Strengthen whole-of-Government coordination through inter-agency forums, coordinated planning processes, and clear governance structures for cross-cutting priorities
- Conduct periodic Agency capability reviews to identify gaps and support development needs

3.1.3 Efficiency

Objective: Promote value for money and optimal use of resources through improved processes, systems, and decision-making.

Rationale:

Budget constraints and a small population base limit the Public Sector's capacity to adequately resource all functions. Limited resources require maximum efficiency. The Functional Review emphasized strengthening prioritization, consolidating public finances, and building shared capabilities. Efficiency gains free resources for priority services and enable the Public Sector to do more with less, while maintaining quality and accountability.

Shared service arrangements will be developed primarily for Public Service Agencies overseen by the Public Service Commissioner. Implementation will require adequate central capacity, appropriate systems, and sufficient resourcing to deliver services effectively without constraining Agency operations. Statutory entities and Crown Agencies may participate in shared services where this supports their operational requirements and governance frameworks.

Whilst shared service models will deliver efficiencies across Government, sufficient flexibility will be maintained for Agencies operating specialized or time-critical systems. For example, sectors such as education with national examination and qualification platforms requiring immediate technical support, or sectors facing global workforce shortages requiring close alignment between HR capability and sector-specific workforce strategies, may retain appropriate levels of dedicated capability. Detailed business cases and consultation with Agencies will determine the appropriate balance between centralization and Agency-level capability to ensure efficiency gains are achieved without affecting essential service delivery.

Key Outcomes:

- Improved resource allocation through robust prioritization processes aligned with strategic outcomes
- Reduced duplication through shared services delivering corporate functions across Government
- Enhanced financial management and accountability, and value-for-money through full FMIS implementation
- Strategic use of private sector capacity where it delivers better value to outsource while maintaining service quality
- Streamlined processes and reduced bureaucracy enabling faster, more responsive service delivery
- Strengthened procurement practices ensuring value for money and probity

Priority Actions:

- Strengthen the annual prioritization process with clearer links to Government strategic outcomes
- Complete roll out of FMIS (Financial Management Information System) across all Agencies
- Implement shared services for corporate functions (ICT, finance, HR, legal, communications and policy)
- Establish framework for strategic private sector engagement where outsourcing will result in efficiencies and effectiveness
- Implement business process improvements and reduce bureaucracy across Agencies
- Strengthen procurement practices and value-for-money assessments
- Establish Inter-Departmental Executive Boards where relevant to align and coordinate strategic policy, planning, and budgeting across departments with shared responsibilities (building on existing models such as the Combined Law Agencies Group)

3.1.4 Employee Wellbeing

Objective: Attract, develop, and retain high-quality employees through fair employment practices, career development opportunities, and comprehensive wellbeing support.

Rationale:

The Cook Islands Public Sector faces a critical workforce challenge: competing for skilled talent in an open labour market with New Zealand and Australia, particularly in sectors experiencing global shortages (healthcare, education, finance, ICT). Retention requires a comprehensive approach in addressing four inter-connected priorities.

1. The Public Sector must prioritize Cook Islands talent. Localisation strengthens institutional knowledge and builds sustainable capability. Cook Islanders and permanent residents with appropriate qualifications and experience will be prioritised for senior positions based on merit, recognising young professionals who have invested in their development to serve their country.
2. Professional development must be equitable. Capacity building will be delivered across all levels—not just selected individuals—ensuring mid-level and senior public servants alike access modern skills development. This supports career progression throughout the Public Sector and prevents the marginalisation of experienced staff.
3. Employee health directly impacts workforce sustainability. Over 60% of public servants experience non-communicable diseases (NCDs) including obesity, hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular conditions. Maintaining workforce capability requires promoting healthy lifestyle changes, supporting individual accountability for health, and ensuring succession planning accounts for health-related transitions.
4. Fair remuneration, career pathways, work-life balance, and employee recognition were consistently emphasised throughout consultations. A valued, healthy, and motivated workforce is essential for delivering quality public services and building the resilient Public Sector the Cook Islands needs.

5. Given the relatively mature workforce profile in some sectors, the Strategy aligns with the National Workforce Development Plan 2026-2035 to address leadership development, succession planning and skills pipelines for the next generation of public servants. This coordinated approach ensures workforce capability is maintained as experienced staff transition and new leaders emerge.

Key Outcomes:

- Improved attraction and retention of skilled employees across the Public Sector particularly Cook Islanders and permanent residents
- Fair and competitive remuneration framework recognizing qualifications, skills and performance
- Clear career pathways with accessible professional development opportunities across all levels
- Comprehensive employee wellbeing programmes supporting cultural, mental, and physical health
- Healthy workforce with reduced NCD impacts through prevention, support, and succession planning
- Improved work-life balance and employee satisfaction (measured through regular surveys)
- Strengthened performance management systems linked to professional development and career progression

Priority Actions:

- Develop and implement a National HR Strategy embedding localization principles
- Review and update the remuneration framework for equity and competitiveness
- Establish clear career progression pathways across the Public Sector with equitable access to professional development
- Implement comprehensive employee wellbeing programmes (mental health, work-life balance, NCD prevention)
- Strengthen succession planning addressing workforce demographics and health transitions
- Develop education-to-employment pathways (internships, cadet programmes, scholarships) for Cook Islands youth
- Strengthen performance management linked to professional development and career progression

3.1.5 Digital Resilience

Objective: Leverage technology to enhance service delivery, connectivity, and operational efficiency across the Public Service.

Rationale:

Digital transformation is critical for modern, responsive Government. The National Digital Strategy 2024-2030 and Functional Review emphasized “digitization by default” - digital services

as the primary channel, with non-digital options maintained for those who need them. Digital services offer significant benefits for the Cook Islands Public Service – improved accessibility, particularly benefitting Pa Enua communities with limited physical access to Government Offices; enhanced efficiency, better connectivity, data-driven decisions and improved service quality.

Key Outcomes:

- Expanded digital Government services accessible online and via mobile, with Pa Enua accessibility prioritized
- Enhanced digital literacy across the Public Sector workforce enabling effective use of digital tools and services
- Robust and secure digital infrastructure with strong cybersecurity protections and data privacy safeguards
- Improved digital connectivity for Pa Enua communities enabling access to online Government services
- Improved data management, information sharing and inter-operability between Government systems
- Digital inclusion ensured through maintaining non-digital service channels for those who need them

Priority Actions:

- Expand digital service delivery aligned with National Digital Strategy 2024-2030, prioritizing high-volume services and Pa Enua accessibility
- Build digital literacy across the Public Sector through comprehensive training and development programmes
- Strengthen cybersecurity frameworks, data protection controls, and business continuity arrangements to protect Government systems and information
- Implement centralized ICT shared services providing infrastructure, support, and expertise across Government
- Improve digital connectivity infrastructure for Pa Enua
- Improve data management practices, information sharing protocols, and system interoperability across agencies

3.1.6 Responsiveness and Communication

Objective: Foster timely, transparent, and user-centered services with effective communication and meaningful engagement with communities and stakeholders.

Rationale:

Stakeholder consultations emphasized critical needs for better responsiveness to community needs, improved communication with stakeholders, user-centred design, meaningful engagement and transparency and accountability. Effective communication builds trust between Government and citizens. Responsive user-centred services demonstrate that Government

listens, values public input, and is accountable for performance. This is particularly important in the Cook Islands context where customary relationships, community consultation, and respect are foundational to good governance.

Key Outcomes:

- Established service standards with clear, published timeframes for key public services
- Improved customer feedback and complaints mechanisms enabling users to voice concerns and drive improvements
- Enhanced public communication ensuring clear, accessible information about Government services, decisions, and performance
- Services designed around user needs and accessibility, informed by regular consultation with communities
- Strengthened engagement with Pa Enua communities, traditional leaders, and civil society organizations
- Increased public trust and satisfaction with Government services (measured through regular surveys)
- Transparent performance reporting showing how Government is meeting service standards and responding to feedback

Priority Actions:

- Establish and publish service standards for key public services with clear timeframes and performance commitments
- Implement accessible customer feedback and complaints systems across Agencies with clear response protocols
- Strengthen whole-of-Government communications through coordinated protocols, shared resources, and consistent standards
- Conduct regular user needs assessments and community consultations to inform service design and improvements
- Establish systematic engagement mechanisms for Pa Enua communities and traditional leaders on matters affecting them
- Publish regular performance reports showing how Government is meeting service standards and responding to public feedback

3.1.7 Transparency and Accountability

Objective: Build public trust through clear expectations, visible performance, robust accountability mechanisms and transparent reporting.

Rationale:

The Functional Review emphasized the critical importance of promoting transparency and accountability for public sector performance and legitimacy. Public trust in Government depends on visible performance, clear expectations, demonstrated accountability, strong oversight, accessible information for results. When citizens can see what Government commits to deliver, track progress against those commitments, and see that leaders are held accountable for results, trust increases. Conversely, opacity, unclear responsibilities, and absence of consequences undermine public confidence even when Government performs well.

There are growing risks to the inappropriate use of public money and unethical behaviour in the Public Sector. The principal defences to mitigate these risks – transparency around the performance of public entities, effective performance management of public servants at all levels, and workable accountability mechanisms – need significant strengthening to meet the challenge.

Transparency and accountability are not just about compliance - they drive performance improvement by making results visible, enabling learning from both successes and failures, and creating incentives for excellence. However, behaviour alone is not sufficient. Weak systems, outdated processes, inadequate tools and insufficient training create the conditions in which public resources are misused, even when intent is sound. Strengthening transparency and accountability therefore requires action on three fronts: (i) modernizing the legislative frameworks that set the benchmarks for integrity and guide Public Sector conduct; (ii) investing in fit-for-purpose digital tools that support transparent decision-making and reporting; and (iii) equipping public servants with the training they need to meet contemporary professional standards. Conduct and capability must be addressed together.

State-Owned Enterprises operate under their own performance and reporting framework, including Statements of Corporate Intent, regular Board reporting, and oversight by the Cook Islands Investment Corporation (CIIC) in accordance with the CIIC Act 1998 and relevant SOE legislation.

Key Outcomes:

- Strengthened performance management frameworks linking individual, Agency, and whole-of-Government performance to national strategic outcomes
- Enhanced public reporting on Government performance including annual State of the Public Service Report to Parliament and accessible to the public.
- Clear expectations and accountabilities for Public Sector leaders through comprehensive performance agreements aligned with Agency and national priorities
- Improved internal audit, risk management, and compliance functions providing independent assurance
- Transparent reporting on financial management, procurement, and use of public resources
- Strengthened oversight mechanisms enabling effective scrutiny by Parliament, Audit office and other independent bodies

Priority Actions:

- Strengthen performance management frameworks with clear line of sight from individual performance to Agency outcomes to national strategic priorities
- Enhance public reporting on Government performance including annual State of the Public Service Report, Agency performance reports, and accessible data on service delivery
- Clarify expectations for Heads of Agencies through updated performance agreements linked to Agency strategic plans and national priorities, with regular review and assessment

- Strengthen internal audit and risk management functions across all Agencies, with independent reporting lines and appropriate resourcing
- Improve financial transparency through enhanced reporting on expenditure, procurement, and value-for-money achieved with public resources.
- Support effective Parliamentary and independent oversight through timely comprehensive reporting and responsiveness to scrutiny

3.1.8 Climate-Resilient Operations

Objective: To integrate climate adaptation into Public Sector planning and operations, ensuring continuity of essential services and building resilience to climate-related risks.

Rationale:

The Cook Islands faces increasing climate-related risks including sea-level rise, extreme weather events, and changing rainfall patterns. The Public Sector must integrate climate adaptation into its planning and operations to ensure continuity of essential services and model climate-resilient practices.

Key Outcomes:

- Public Sector infrastructure and facilities are designed and maintained to withstand climate impacts
- Business continuity plans across all Agencies account for climate-related disruptions
- Essential Government services remain operational during climate-related events
- Agencies have developed sector-specific climate adaptation measures aligned with their mandates
- The Public Sector demonstrates leadership in climate resilient practices

Priority Actions:

- Incorporate climate risk assessments into all infrastructure planning, asset management and capital works programmes
- Update Business continuity plans to include climate-related scenarios (cyclones, flooding, drought, sea-level impacts)
- Ensure new Government buildings and facilities meet climate-resilient design standards
- Support Agencies to develop sector specific climate adaptation plans where relevant to their functions (e.g., Te Marae Ora's Climate and Health Adaptation Plan supporting Green Climate Fund projects addressing health impacts of climate change).
- Establish guidelines for climate resilience procurement and asset management
- Build climate adaptation capability within the Public Service through training and knowledge sharing
- Coordinate with national climate change initiatives to ensure alignment between agency-level and whole-of-government responses

3.2 Pa Enua Priorities

The Pa Enua faces unique challenges due to geographic isolation, smaller populations, and limited infrastructure. that require tailored approaches. This section addresses priorities specific to outer islands public service delivery.

3.2.1 Fit for Purpose Pa Enua Services

Key Objectives:

- Strengthen Pa Enua public service capacity and capability
- Improve service delivery models appropriate to Pa Enua contexts
- Enhance coordination between Rarotonga-based Agencies and Pa Enua services

Priority Actions:

- Review OPM capacity to provide support for Pa Enua Public Sector, considering unique challenges of each Island
- Consider re-introducing centralised support functions for Pa Enua rather than across Government Departments

3.2.2 Clarity in Pa Enua Governance

Key Objectives:

- Clarify rolesand responsibilities of Island Councils, Island Governments, and central Agencies
- Update Pa Enua governance framework to reduce ambiguity
- Strengthen local decision-making authority where appropriate

Priority Actions:

- Review Island Government Act and roles of PSC, OPM, Aronga Mana and Rarotonga-based Agencies in supporting Pa Enua Public Sector

3.2.3 Pa Enua Efficiency

Key Objectives:

- Optimize resource allocation for Pa Enua services
- Improve infrastructure and connectivity to enable efficient service delivery. Investing in Pa Enua connectivity accelerates not only workforce service delivery but also addresses secondary education challenges where students are reluctant to leave home islands due to accommodation shortages on Rarotonga.
- Leverage technology to overcome geographic barriers

Priority Actions:

- Provide improved mechanisms for Island Governments to participate in Government processes and advocate for appropriate support and funding

- Support Island Governments to develop coordinated response to accessing core services
- Establish process for coordinated and efficient Government consultation in Pa Enua

3.2.4 Pa Enua Employee Resilience and Wellbeing

Key Objectives:

- Improve career pathways and development opportunities for Pa Enua staff
- Address workforce retention challenges through targeted initiatives
- Provide appropriate support for multi-role responsibilities
- Enhance recognition of Pa Enua Public Service contributions

Priority Actions:

- Establish Pa Enua human resources system recognising multi-role responsibilities through appropriate job descriptions, remuneration, training, incentives, career paths and secondment opportunities
- Provide support for innovative working practices such as remote and virtual working

4. ALIGNMENT WITH NATIONAL STRATEGIES





4. Alignment with National Strategies

The Public Sector Strategy 2026-2031 is designed to enable and accelerate progress across all national development priorities. By strengthening Public Sector capability, efficiency, and responsiveness, this Strategy creates the foundation for achieving NSDA 2020+ goals, implementing Functional Review recommendations, and delivering on commitments made in sector-specific strategies.

The alignment is intentional and strategic, ensuring that improvements in Public Sector performance directly translate to better outcomes for Cook Islanders.

Table 4.1: Strategic Alignment Matrix

National Strategy	Key Focus Areas	How PSS Aligns	PSS Themes
NSDA 2020+	Wellbeing for All; 17 SDG-aligned goals	Public Sector enables all NSDA goals, particularly Goals 1 (Wellbeing) and 15 (Good Governance)	All 7 themes
Functional Review 2023	Prioritization; Service delivery; Digitization; Transparency; Financial consolidation	FR principles directly inform PSS objectives and implementation	All themes, especially Efficiency, Digital Resilience, Transparency
Economic Development Strategy 2030	Economic transformation; Equity; People development; Investment	Public Sector employs 17% of workforce; Government spending ~30% GDP; efficiency supports economic goals	Fit for Purpose, Employee Wellbeing, Efficiency
National Employment Policy 2025-2030	Legal framework; Equity; Workforce development; Future-ready labour	Public Sector models decent work practices and leads workforce development	Employee Wellbeing, Clarity in Statute
National Digital Strategy 2024-2030	Digital infrastructure; Digital literacy; Digital Government	PSS drives digital Government transformation	Digital Resilience
National Workforce Development Plan 2026-2035	Labour governance; Education; Public sector HR; Private sector development	Public Sector HR pillar directly aligns with PSS employee objectives	Employee Wellbeing, Fit for Purpose
Gender Equality Policy 2019-2024	Women empowerment; Inclusive employment; Equal opportunities	Cross-cutting theme across all Public Sector activities	Cross-cutting all themes

This alignment ensures that the Public Sector Strategy is not operating in isolation but is integral to the achievement of national development aspirations across economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

5. IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING







5. Implementation and Monitoring

This section outlines how the Strategy will be implemented, monitored, and evaluated. It consolidates priority actions, monitoring frameworks, and governance arrangements into clear, actionable guidance.

Table 5.1: Implementation Framework

This Table consolidates priority actions across all strategic themes, showing lead responsibilities, timelines, resources, and key dependencies.

Theme	Priority Action	Lead	Timeline	Resources	Dependencies[2]
Clarity in Statute	Review & update Public Service Act	OPSC	2026-2027	Legal TA	Cabinet/Parliament
	Clarify OPSC jurisdiction	OPSC	2026	Internal	Legislative amendments
Fit for Purpose	Implement shared services (ICT, Finance, HR, Legal)	OPM/ MFEM/ OPSC/ CLO	2026-2028	Infrastructure, change mgmt	Business case approval[3]
	Conduct Agency capability reviews	OPSC	2026-2031	Internal + TA	Review framework
Efficiency	Complete FMIS roll out across all Agencies	MFEM	2026-2027	FMIS licenses, training, data validation support	Agency financial data quality and completeness, connectivity
	Establish outsourcing framework	OPSC/MFEM	2027	Policy development	Cabinet policy
	Strengthen annual prioritization process	MFEM/OPSC	2026 ongoing	Internal	Budget cycle
Employee Wellbeing	Develop national HR strategy	OPSC	2026-2027	HR expertise, consultation	Consultation completed
	Review remuneration framework	OPSC/MFEM	2027-2028	Remuneration study	Fiscal capacity[4]
	Implement employee wellbeing programmes	All Agencies	2026 ongoing	Programme costs	Agency commitment
Digital Resilience	Expand digital Government services	OPM	2026-2030	Digital infrastructure	Connectivity, capability

[2] Dependencies refers to the pre-requisites, conditions or approvals that must be put in place before a priority action can be successfully implemented or completed.
[3] Requires an approved business case before implementation can start.
[4] Depends on Government having the financial resources available.

Theme	Priority Action	Lead	Timeline	Resources	Dependencies[2]
	Build digital literacy programmes	OPSC/OPM	2026 ongoing	Training programmes	Training resources
Responsiveness	Establish and publish service standards	OPSC	2026-2027	Standards development	Agency buy-in
	Implement customer feedback systems	All Agencies	2027 ongoing	Systems cost	Digital infrastructure
	Modernize Government HR Policies	OPSC	2026 ongoing	Policy development	Agency support
Transparency	Strengthen performance frameworks	OPSC/MFEM	2026-2027	Framework development	Data systems
	Enhance public reporting	All Agencies	2027 ongoing	Communication resources	Information systems
Pa Enua	Improve career pathways for Pa Enua staff	OPSC	2026-2028	HR systems, training	Consultation
	Enhance Pa Enua digital connectivity	OPM	2026-2030	Infrastructure investment	Budget approval

Note: This Table shows key priority actions. Additional detailed actions are outlined in Agency-specific implementation plans and annual work programmes.

Table 5.2: Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

This simplified framework focuses on seven key outcome indicators that measure overall Strategy success. A more complex multi-level framework with actionable, measurable indicators is kept on file by OPSC. In addition to system-level indicators, operational measures will track improvements in service delivery including service standards compliance, processing timeframes for routine transactions, effectiveness of cross-Agency coordination on major initiatives, and delivery milestones for strategic programmes. These operational metrics will provide insights into how Public Sector capability improvements translate into tangible service enhancements.

#	Outcome Indicator	How Measured	Baseline	Target 2031	Data Source	Frequency
1	Public Sector Performance Index	Composite: leadership capability, service quality, efficiency, innovation	Establish 2026	80/100	OPSC assessment + surveys	Annual (Q1)
2	Employee Satisfaction & Wellbeing	Staff survey: job satisfaction, workload, career development, culture	Establish 2026	75% positive	OPSC/HRMIS employee survey	Biannual
3	Youth Participation in Governance	Staff survey: job satisfaction, workload, career development, culture	Establish 2026	60% positive	OPSC/HRMIS employee survey	Every two years (Q3)
4	Digital Service Delivery Rate	% of services available online/mobile	30% (2026)	70%	OPM digital services register	Annual
5	Public Trust in Government: Identify priority areas for service delivery improvement	Public Perception survey: experience, trust, satisfaction, perceived integrity.	Establish 2026	70%	Independent public survey	Every two years (Q3)
6	Agency Performance Standards	% Agencies meeting/exceeding performance standards	Establish 2026	90%	OPSC performance review + audit	Annual (Q4)
7	Pa Enua Workforce Stability	Staff turnover rate in Pa Enua	Establish 2026	<15% annual	HRMIS + Island Council HR	Annual
8	Cross-Agency Collaboration	Number of successful cross-Agency projects completed	Establish 2026	15 projects/year	OPSC project tracking	Annual (Q1)

5.1 Implementation Risk Management

Large Public Sector reform programmes often encounter challenges such as workforce constraints, competing priorities and technology transitions. Implementation will be managed through phased approaches, regular risk assessment, and adaptive planning to ensure reform efforts remain realistic and sustainable over time. Annual reviews will identify emerging risks and allow for course corrections where required.

5.2 Data Collection and Reporting

Responsibilities:

- OPSC: Coordinates all MEL activities, administers surveys, consolidates reports, provides support to Agencies
- Agencies: Provide data as required, implement Agency-level monitoring systems
- Central Agencies (MFEM, OPM, Crown Law): Provide specialized data for their mandates

Reporting Schedule:

- Biannual updates to Public Service Commissioner
- Biannual reports to Cabinet on Strategy progress
- Annual State of the Public Service report to Parliament
- Mid-term review in 2029 to assess progress and recommend adjustments
- Final comprehensive review in 2031 to inform next Strategy iteration

5.3 Lead Agency Roles

Implementation is coordinated by three Central Agencies, each contributing according to their mandate:

Office of the Public Service Commissioner (OPSC)

- Overall Strategy coordination and leadership and stakeholder engagement
- Monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) activities
- Capacity building and professional development across Public Sector
- Policy development for Public Service management
- Performance management frameworks and oversight
- Public Service leadership development

Ministry of Finance and Economic Management (MFEM)

- Financial oversight and fiscal policy coordination
- Budget coordination and resource allocation
- Financial performance frameworks and standards
- Internal audit and risk management functions
- Economic and fiscal advice to support Strategy implementation

Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)

- Digital Strategy coordination and digital Government leadership
- Whole-of-Government communications
- Cross-Agency coordination on national priorities
- Cabinet secretariat support for Strategy oversight
- Administration of the Island Government Act 2012-13 and coordination of Pa Enua support in partnership with relevant Agencies and Island Governments

All other Public Sector Agencies contribute to implementation according to their mandates and as specified in the Implementation Framework (Table 5.1).

5.4 Governance Structure

A Public Sector Strategy Sub-Committee, chaired by the Public Service Commissioner, provides strategic oversight and monitors implementation. The Sub-Committee comprises:

- Public Service Commissioner (Chair)
- Financial Secretary (MFEM)
- Chief of Staff (OPM)
- Selected Heads of Agencies on rotating basis
- Representatives from Pa Enua as appropriate
- Young professional representatives from the Public Service

The Sub-Committee:

- Meets quarterly to review implementation progress
- Reports to Cabinet biannually on Strategy implementation
- Provides strategic direction and resolves implementation challenges
- Oversees the mid-term and final reviews of the Strategy and measure outcomes (with external TA support if required)
- Ensures diverse perspectives, including youth voices, inform Strategy implementation and adaptation

Inclusive Governance

The inclusion of young professionals in the governance structure reflects the Strategy's commitment to developing future leaders and ensuring the next generation has meaningful input into Public Sector reform. Young professional representatives will be selected through a process coordinated by OPSC, ensuring representation from both Rarotonga and Pa Enua where feasible.

5.5 Reviews and Revisions

To ensure the Strategy remains relevant and responsive:

- A mid-term review will be conducted in 2029 (three years after adoption) to assess progress against the MERL framework, identify implementation challenges, and recommend adjustments.
- A comprehensive final review will be conducted in 2031 to evaluate overall Strategy outcomes and inform the development of the next Public Sector Strategy.
- The Strategy may be revised earlier if required due to major economic, political, social, or legislative changes that significantly affect the operating environment.

Appendix: Glossary and Acronyms

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
BTIB	Business Trade and Investment Board
CIGov	Cook Islands Government
CLO	Crown Law Office
EDS	Economic Development Strategy 2030
ERA	Employment Relations Act 2012
FMIS	Financial Management Information System
FR	Cook Islands Government Functional Review 2023
HoA	Heads of Agencies
HR	Human Resources
HRMIS	Human Resource Management Information System
ICT	Information Communication and Technology
INTAFF	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
MFEM	Ministry of Finance and Economic Management
NEP	National Employment Policy 2025-2030
NSDA	National Sustainable Development Agenda 2020+
NWDP	National Workforce Development Plan 2026-2035
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
OPSC	Office of the Public Service Commissioner
Pa Enua	Outer Islands
PSC	Public Service Commissioner
PSS	Public Sector Strategy
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
TA	Technical Assistance

SOE Entities: Avaroa Cables Ltd (ACL), Airport Authority (AACI), Cook Islands Government Property Corporation (CIGPC), Cook Islands Ports Authority (CIPA), Te Aponga Uira o Tumu Tevarovaro (TAU), Cook Islands Broadcasting Corporation (CIBC), Te Mana Uira o Araura (TMU), To Tatou Vai (TTV), Cobalt Seabed Resources Ltd (CSR)

[3] **Statutory Entities:** Business Trade and Investment (BTIB), Cook Islands Investment Corporation (+Punanga Nui Market) (CIIC), Cook Islands National Heritage Trust (CINHT), Cook Islands Seabed Minerals Authority (SBMA), Cook Islands Tourism Corporation (CITC), Financial Supervisory Commission (FSC) (+ Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), Financial Services Development Authority (FSDA), National Environment Services (NES) (Tu'anga Taporoporo)

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Capability	Knowledge, skills and behaviours public servants need to perform in their roles
Centralization	Process where Central Agencies deliver shared activities for the Public Sector
Central Agencies	Office of the Public Service Commissioner, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Office of the Prime Minister
Collaboration	Working together transparently across Agencies to achieve common goals
Consolidation	Joining Agencies or functions together to improve service delivery
Digital Resilience	Ability to leverage technology effectively and adapt to digital change
Efficiency	Achieving results with optimal use of resources
Governance	Framework of accountability, decision-making, and oversight
Machinery of Government	Organizational structures, reporting lines, and institutional arrangements
Outsourcing	Contracting external providers to deliver specific services or functions
Public Sector	All Government entities including Public Service, Crown Agencies, SOEs, and Island Governments
Public Service	Government Agencies under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commissioner – Ministries and Island Governments
Resilience	Ability to withstand and recover from challenges and shocks
Responsive	Timely, accessible, and tailored to user needs
Shared Services	Common functions delivered centrally to multiple Agencies (e.g., ICT, HR, finance)
Stakeholders	People or organizations with interest in Public Service including Government, employees, public, private sector
Strategy	Long-term plan for achieving vision and goals
Transparency	Openness in decision-making and actions
Vision	Desired future state of the Public Sector
Vaka	Traditional voyaging canoe used as metaphor for Public Sector collaboration

Public Service Values

As defined in Section 20 of the Public Service Act, the values have been organized to show progression from personal character, to professional conduct, to service delivery:

Personal Character

- *Honesty* -- acting honestly, being truthful, and abiding by the laws
- *Respect* -- treating people with courtesy and respect

Professional Conduct

- *Impartiality* -- providing impartial advice, acting without fear or favour
- *Transparency* -- taking actions and making decisions in an open way
- *Accountability* -- being able to explain reasons for actions and taking responsibility

Service Delivery

- *Service* -- serving the people well through faithful service
- *Efficiency and Effectiveness* -- achieving good results economically

Cook Islands Government

Public Sector Strategy 2026–2031

Implementation Plan

For: Heads of Agencies and Ministries | Cabinet and Ministers | Pa Enua Island Governments | OPSC

1. Purpose

This Implementation Plan supports delivery of the Cook Islands Public Sector Strategy (PSS) 2026–2031. It outlines what needs to happen, who is responsible, and by when — structured around three clear phases across the Strategy's life. It is intended as a practical working guide for all Agencies, Central Agencies, Pa Enua Island Governments, and the Office of the Public Service Commissioner (OPSC).

The Plan is designed to be proportionate. Implementation of the PSS will be integrated into Agencies' existing Strategic Plans and annual Business Plans wherever possible, so that delivery does not create a parallel workload on top of business as usual. [3]

The Implementation Approach consists of three interrelated tools – the Implementation Plan, Monitoring Framework and Reporting Approach

Implementation Plan
The Implementation Plan is a navigation tool to guide leaders and the Public Sector on a journey to achieve the Public Sector Goal of "A Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector" together. The Implementation Plan identifies the phase to ensure actions, resourcing, stakeholder involvement and timelines are coordinated to be delivered.

Monitoring & Evaluation
The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework is to build accountability and commitment to the Implementation Plan to capture quantifiable and qualifiable information to track performance and delivery of expected outcomes under each phase.

Reporting Approach
It is anticipated that Agencies and Leaders will Report deliverables within existing and developing reporting mechanisms, agreed timelines and formats. The Public Sector Strategy is a living document to be navigated through a collaborative and participatory effort within the resourcing capability and capacity.

[3] Refer to the implementation caveats at the end of this Plan.

2. Governance

The Public Service Commissioner has overall accountability for the PSS implementation. A PSS Sub-Committee, chaired by the Public Service Commissioner, will meet quarterly and report to Cabinet biannually. The Sub-Committee comprises the Financial Secretary (MFEM), the Chief of Staff (OPM), selected Heads of Agencies on a rotating basis, Pa Enua representatives where appropriate, and young professional representatives from the Public Service.

OPSC also holds responsibility as the Secretariat for the PSS Sub-Committee.

Heads of Agencies and Ministries are accountable for embedding the PSS within their Agency's strategic and operational planning. Pa Enua Island Governments are supported by OPM and OPSC and will be engaged individually to agree realistic priorities and timelines that reflect their specific circumstances.

3. Implementation Phases

Implementation is structured across three phases. Priority actions within each phase are indicative. OPSC will engage with each Agency individually to agree timelines, taking into account capacity, existing workloads, and planning cycles.

Phase	Priority Actions	Lead	Indicative Timeline
Phase 1 Year 1 (2026) Foundations	• OPSC briefs all Agencies on PSS priorities and how they fit within existing planning cycles • Agencies embed PSS objectives into their existing Strategic Plans and annual Business Plans — no separate PSS work programme is required • OPSC develops a simple one-page Reporting Guide; Agencies may use their own existing templates where these already capture relevant progress • Begin review and update of the Public Service Act and OPSC jurisdiction clarification • Establish 2026 baseline data for the seven PSS outcome indicators • MFEM progresses FMIS rollout to remaining Agencies • OPM/OPSC/MFEM scope shared services business case (ICT, HR, Finance, Legal) • Pa Enua: OPSC and OPM support Island Governments to build capacity and deliver services aligned with national priorities and local realities.	**OPSC (lead)** MFEM OPM All Agencies	Apr/May – Dec 2026 *[1] Timelines will be agreed with each Agency individually, taking into account their existing priorities, resourcing and planning cycles.*
Phase 2 Years 2–3 (2027–2028) Delivery	• Agencies report PSS progress through existing Business Plan and Cabinet reporting — no additional PSS report required unless specifically requested by OPSC • OPSC launches National HR Strategy; begins remuneration review in partnership with MFEM • Shared Services business case finalised and submitted for Cabinet approval; implementation begins where resourced and agreed • OPM expands digital Government services; OPM will deliver modular, user-focused digital services to improve outcomes, with digital literacy introduced in step with system implementation to ensure uptake and trust is supported. OPM will lead the digital literacy training in collaboration with OPSC across Agencies (schedule to be agreed) • OPSC publishes first annual State of the Public Service Report to Parliament — a system-level report on the overall health and performance of the Public Sector, compiled by OPSC from data already held across Government; this is not an additional reporting obligation for Agencies • Service standards established and published for key public-facing services — covering published timeframes for common transactions (e.g. licence renewals, permit applications, complaint responses); this is about responsiveness and transparency of service delivery, not shared services or sector groupings • Pa Enua: targeted career pathway and HR system improvements implemented • Climate risk assessments integrated into Agency infrastructure and business continuity planning	**OPSC (lead)** MFEM OPM All Agencies	2027–2028 *[2] Where an Agency lacks capacity and resourcing, OPSC will agree a revised timeline rather than proceed without adequate resourcing.*
Phase 3 Years 4–5 (2029–2031) Consolidate & Review	• Mid-term PSS review (2029): assess progress against outcome indicators, identify implementation challenges, and agree adjustments for the final phase • Embed and sustain reforms from Phases 1 and 2; Shared Services are fully operational where resourced and approved • OPSC conducts final PSS review (2031) and evaluates outcomes against 2026 baselines • Prepare the next Public Sector Strategy 2032+, drawing on lessons learnt • Final public report on PSS outcomes published	**OPSC (lead)** PSS Sub-Committee All Agencies	2029 – 2031 *Mid-term review: 2029* *Final review: 2031*

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

The NSDA outcome indicators will be used to measure overall PSS success. NSDA baselines will be used or established in 2026. OPSC coordinates all monitoring and reporting activities and will draw on data already held within Government systems wherever possible, to minimise the burden on individual Agencies.

#	Outcome Indicator	How Measured	Data Source	Frequency and Reporting Note
1	**Public Sector Performance Index**	Composite score: leadership capability, service quality, efficiency, innovation	OPSC assessment + surveys	Annual (Q1) — OPSC coordinates; Agencies contribute existing data only
2	**Employee Satisfaction & Wellbeing**	Staff survey: job satisfaction, workload, career development, culture	OPSC/HRMIS survey	Every two years — OPSC administers and coordinates all logistics; Agency obligation is limited to communicating the survey to staff and allowing time for completion. Frequency may move to annual once the system is established and OPSC resourcing allows.
3	**Digital Service Delivery Rate**	% of Government services available online or via mobile	OPM Digital Services Register	Annual — OPM collates; Agencies confirm their own service listings
4	**Public Trust in Government**	Public Perception Survey: experience, trust, satisfaction, integrity	Independent survey (externally contracted)	Every 2 years — externally administered; no Agency action required
5	**Agency Compliance with the Performance Management Policy**	% of Agencies compliant with the CIGOV Performance Management Policy 2024 — assessed against completion of Professional Development Plans (PDPs), mid-year progress reviews, and annual appraisals within required timeframes	OPSC compliance monitoring (existing function under the Performance Management Policy 2024)	Annual (Q4) — OPSC collates through its existing compliance monitoring role; no new reporting system required for Agencies
6	**Pa Enua Workforce Stability**	Annual staff turnover rate in Pa Enua	HRMIS + Island Council HR records	Annual — Island Governments use existing HR records
7	**Cross-Agency Collaboration**	Number of cross-Agency initiatives completed that demonstrate genuine collaboration through shared service delivery, cost-sharing, or coordinated policy work — as reported through Agency annual Business Plan reporting	Agency Business Plan reporting to OPSC	Annual (Q1) — captured through existing Business Plan reporting; no separate log or additional reporting required

5. Roles and Reporting

Central Agencies

- OPSC — overall PSS coordination and monitoring; administers surveys; consolidates reporting; provides guidance as capacity allows.
- MFEM — financial oversight, FMIS rollout, budget coordination, internal audit functions.
- OPM — digital Government leadership, national policy alignment, whole-of-Government communications, cross-Agency coordination, and Pa Enua support.

Heads of Agencies and Ministries

- Reflect relevant PSS objectives within existing Agency Strategic Plans and annual Business Plans.
- Report on PSS-aligned progress through existing reporting mechanisms (Cabinet reports, annual reports, or OPSC-requested updates). No separate PSS report is required unless specifically requested.
- Raise any capacity constraints with OPSC early so that realistic timelines can be agreed before implementation begins.

Pa Enua Island Governments

- Engage with OPSC and OPM to identify which PSS priorities are relevant and achievable within their context.
- Report on Pa Enua workforce and service delivery indicators through existing Island Council and HRMIS records.
- Existing Island Government templates and reporting formats are acceptable. Where existing templates do not capture what is needed, Island Governments should flag this with OPSC before developing anything new, to ensure alignment and avoid duplication.

Reporting Schedule

Reporting Requirement	Responsible	When
Biannual update to Public Service Commissioner	**OPSC**	July and January, annually
Biannual Cabinet progress report	**OPSC**	July and January, annually
Annual State of the Public Service Report to Parliament (system-level report produced by OPSC; distinct from the Annual Performance Review of individual Heads of Agencies; compiled from existing data sources — no separate Agency data collection required)	**OPSC**	Q2 each year (from 2027)
Mid-term PSS review	**OPSC (external TA support if available)**	2029
Final PSS review and outcome evaluation	**OPSC + PSS Sub-Committee**	2031

Implementation Caveats

The following practical notes apply across all phases of this Plan:

- **Agency timelines and OPSC timelines may not always align.** OPSC will work flexibly with each Agency to agree on implementation schedules that are realistic, given their existing priorities and resource constraints.
- **Assigning a PSS recommendation to an Agency does not assume that Agency has the capacity to deliver it immediately.** OPSC will engage with Agencies before finalising any assignment.
- **OPSC also has limited resources.** OPSC may not always have templates, training programmes, or frameworks ready for Agencies at the point they are needed. Agencies should not wait — where OPSC tools are not yet available, Agencies should use their own existing formats and systems.
- **This Plan is a living document.** OPSC will review and update it annually. Agencies are encouraged to raise concerns about timelines, capacity, or reporting requirements at any point.

This Public Sector Strategy 2026-2031 charts a course for a Well-Led, Trusted, Responsive and Collaborative Public Sector that serves all Cook Islanders with excellence.

Kia manuia


COOK ISLANDS