

TE KAUNIHERA Ā-ROHE O

Whanganui

DISTRICT COUNCIL

Whanganui Environmental Scan 2026



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Executive Summary

This environmental scan gives a clear picture of what is happening in Whanganui and what may affect the district in the years ahead. It brings together the most recent information (as at February 2026) to support decisions for the Long-Term Plan (LTP).

The scan looks at both where the district is now and the trends that are likely to shape its future. It helps the Council understand emerging opportunities, risks, and pressures, and provides a shared evidence base for planning and investment.

In line with the Strategy for Whanganui, the scan is organised around five areas: Grow, Build, Activate, Protect, and Celebrate. Some topics, such as population change and Te Awa Tupua, sit across all areas and are presented first to provide context.

The wider environment is changing, with uncertainty around central government reforms and the economic outlook. This scan reflects the information available at the time of writing and is intended to be updated regularly to remain useful for decision-making.

Whakatupu - Grow

Population Growth

Whanganui is expected to experience steady, moderate population growth over the long term. Growth is not rapid, but it is sustained, providing a stable foundation for planning while still requiring careful alignment of infrastructure, housing and services.

Income and wellbeing

Incomes in Whanganui remain below national averages, and growth has slowed. Lower incomes, combined with rising costs, are contributing to financial pressure for households and limiting wider economic participation.

Cost pressures and affordability

While inflation has slowed, costs remain elevated for households, businesses and the council. Higher living costs are limiting households' ability to absorb further increases, including rates, while council costs continue to rise faster than household inflation. This creates ongoing tension between service delivery, investment and affordability.

Labour market challenges

Unemployment is increasing and employment growth has declined. There are also structural challenges, including a smaller proportion of highly skilled roles and high rates of young people not engaged in education, employment or training. Together, these factors point to a need for stronger local employment pathways and skills development.

Economic performance

Economic growth has weakened significantly, with low or negative growth in recent years indicating a risk of stagnation. Employment growth is limited, and business activity is constrained by cost pressures and reduced consumer spending. Improving productivity, attracting investment and supporting higher-value industries will be critical for long-term resilience.

The local economy is strongly tied to primary industries, particularly dairy and forestry, making it sensitive to global market conditions. While this provides strength, it also creates exposure to external volatility and reinforces the need to diversify into higher-value and more resilient sectors.

Social wellbeing and deprivation

A significant proportion of residents live in higher deprivation areas, with impacts on health, housing quality and access to services. Demand for social housing and welfare support remains high, and food insecurity is an emerging issue affecting a growing number of households.

Private housing affordability

Housing capacity exists, but affordability remains a challenge, particularly in the rental market. While house prices are lower than many areas, they remain high relative to local incomes. Rental costs also take up a significant share of income, limiting financial resilience and reinforcing ongoing housing pressure for many households.

Social housing demand

Demand for social housing continues to exceed supply, with a growing waitlist and strong demand for one-bedroom homes. This reflects an ageing population and a high number of single-person households. Many residents on low or fixed incomes remain unable to access suitable housing, highlighting a persistent gap between need and available supply.

Infrastructure and investment pressures

Core infrastructure can support near-term growth, but there are capacity and performance challenges, particularly in wastewater, stormwater and roading. Rising costs, ageing assets and climate pressures are increasing the need for ongoing investment and long-term planning.

Local Water Done Well (water services reform)

The council has committed to a joint water services Council Controlled Organisation with Ruapehu District Council to deliver drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services. This model is designed to meet new national regulatory requirements while maintaining public ownership of assets. The transition will require organisational change and careful implementation, but provides an opportunity to improve service delivery, manage long-term costs, and meet increasing infrastructure and compliance demands.

Whakamānawa - Protect



Emissions and environmental pressures

Whanganui has made progress reducing emissions intensity, but total emissions remain influenced by the district's reliance on primary industries and transport. Recent trends show rising transport emissions and slowing uptake of electric vehicles, highlighting the ongoing challenge of reducing emissions while supporting economic activity.

Climate change and resilience

Climate impacts are already being felt and will intensify over time. Managing risks such as flooding, erosion and infrastructure vulnerability will require proactive planning, investment in resilience, and integration of climate considerations across all areas of council decision-making.

Parks and open spaces

The district has a strong network of parks, reserves and open spaces that support community wellbeing and recreation. There are opportunities to better align these spaces with wider strategic objectives, including climate resilience, physical activity and strengthening connections to Te Awa Tupua and the natural environment.



Whakakorikori - Activate

Emergency preparedness

Whanganui faces increasing risks from flooding and other natural hazards, driven by climate change. While many households report a level of practical resilience, formal preparedness (such as emergency kits) remains mixed. Strengthening community readiness and resilience will be an ongoing priority.

Tourism and visitor economy

Tourism is a growing contributor to the local economy, supported by Whanganui's natural, cultural and creative assets. Visitor spending has increased, however reduced investment and limited accommodation capacity are constraining growth. Continued focus on sustainable management and destination planning will be important to realise the sector's potential.

Whakanuia - Celebrate

Arts and culture

Arts and culture continue to be a growing sector in Whanganui, contributing to both economic activity and community identity. The district's strong events calendar, funding programmes, and creative sector support reflect an active and expanding arts ecosystem, with ongoing opportunities to strengthen participation, attract creative businesses, and support local wellbeing.

Heritage

Whanganui has a large number of nationally significant heritage assets, creating both an opportunity and an ongoing responsibility. Maintaining, protecting and investing in these places is resource-intensive, but they play a key role in the district's identity, tourism offer, and economic value. Balancing preservation with development will remain an important focus.

Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery

The Sarjeant Gallery has delivered strong results since reopening, exceeding visitor expectations and generating significant economic impact for the district. It is now a major driver of cultural tourism and regional attraction, reinforcing Whanganui's position as a creative centre and supporting wider economic activity.

Overview

In this section

- Te Awa Tupua
- Whanganui Land Settlement Negotiation Trust
- Age compositions
- Projected population
- Ethnic diversity
- Inflation index



Te Awa Tupua



The Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017 (the Act) recognises the Whanganui River as a legal person and provides a framework for how the health and wellbeing of the river is recognised and upheld in decision-making.

The Act created new governance and collaboration arrangements, including Te Kōpuka nā Te Awa Tupua, the strategy group responsible for advancing the environmental, social, cultural and economic health and wellbeing of Te Awa Tupua. Te Kōpuka brings together iwi, local government, central government and sector representatives to develop and oversee Te Heke Ngahuru ki Te Awa Tupua, the long-term strategy for the river. The council holds a place on Te Kōpuka and continues to participate in this collaborative framework.

Since the Act came into force, there has been an increasing focus across the organisation on building understanding of Te Awa Tupua and Tupua te Kawa, and what these mean in practice for local government roles, responsibilities and ways of working.

The council is currently progressing a programme of work aimed at embedding the Te Awa Tupua way of life across all workstreams. This reflects a shift away from treating Māori considerations as a discrete section of work, toward integrating Te Awa Tupua principles throughout policy development, project design and decision-making. This approach supports more consistent recognition of the river's health and wellbeing, and the interconnected relationship between the river, the environment and the people of Whanganui.

Whanganui Land Settlement Negotiation Trust

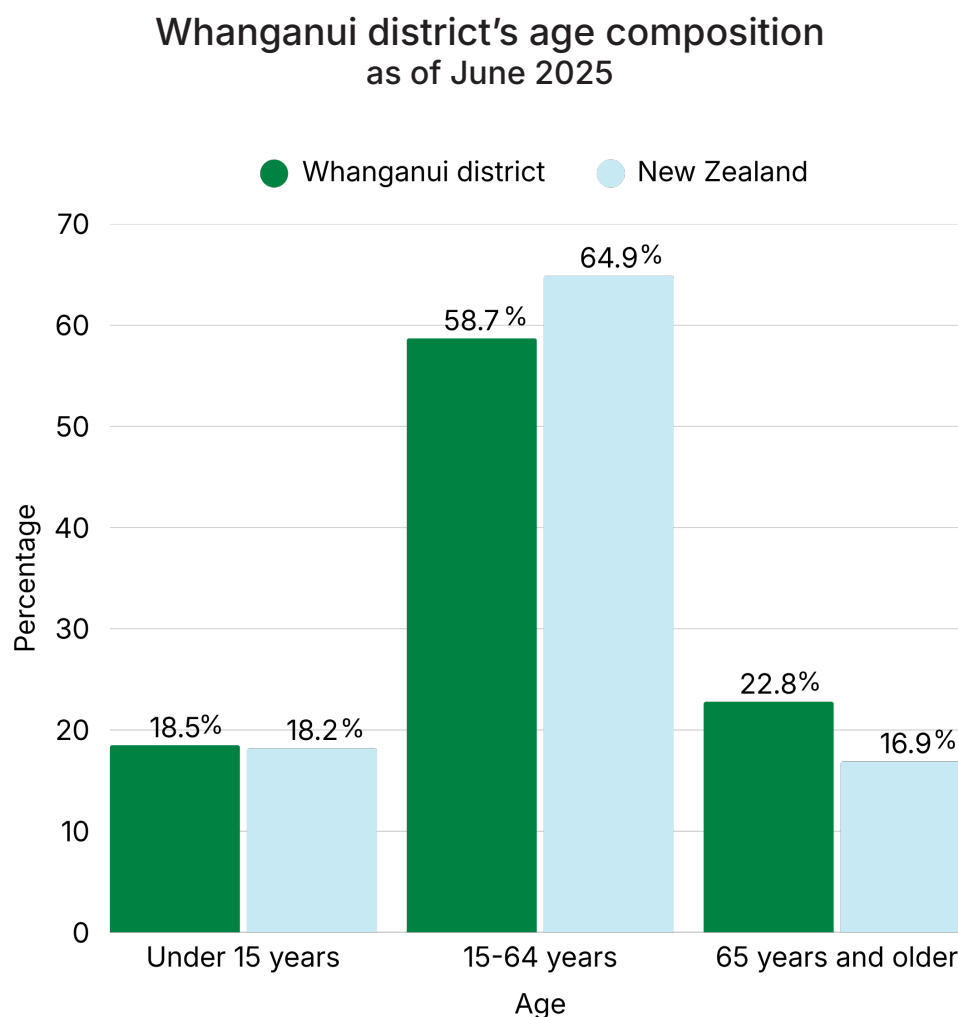


At its meeting on 13 February 2025 the council agreed to sign a relationship agreement with Ngā Hapu o te Iwi o Whanganui, participation in a new joint reserves statutory board and the establishment of a social wellbeing entity (Toitū te Whānau charitable trust) - all subject to final iwi ratification and settlement legislation. These decisions were made after extensive community engagement with strong and diverse feedback received. There is no immediate impact on rates or council powers and any future funding requests to support these arrangements will follow standard council processes.

The next steps were for the settlement partners (the Crown and WLSNT) to finalise the settlement deed and legislation, after which these new partnership arrangements will be implemented. We understand that that process is nearing its completion.

Demographic profile

Age composition



Source: Infometrics, 2025a

Understanding the age structure of Whanganui's population is essential for planning services, infrastructure, and community support.

While the proportion of residents aged under 15 in the district (18.5%) is similar to the national average (18.2%), differences emerge in the working-age and older populations, which has significant implications for the district's economy and wellbeing.

The 15–64 age group, considered the working-age population, represents 58.7% of Whanganui's residents, notably lower than the national figure of 64.9%. A smaller working-age population can limit the local

labour pool, slow economic growth, create labour shortages, and reduce overall business activity.

In contrast, residents aged 65 and over make up 22.8% of the population, compared with 16.9% nationally. This group has grown by 36% over the past 15 years and remains the district's fastest-growing cohort. Over the same period, the under-15 population has slightly declined by 0.5%. Together, these trends illustrate that Whanganui is experiencing a rapidly ageing population.

Projected population growth by age group

The under 15 year old age population range is projected to decline by 0.5% over the next 15 years. This decline is largely due to children currently in the under-15 group who are moving into older age brackets faster than new births. National birth rates have remained relatively stable (Statistics NZ, 2025), so the decrease is driven primarily by local migration patterns, with fewer young families remaining in the district.

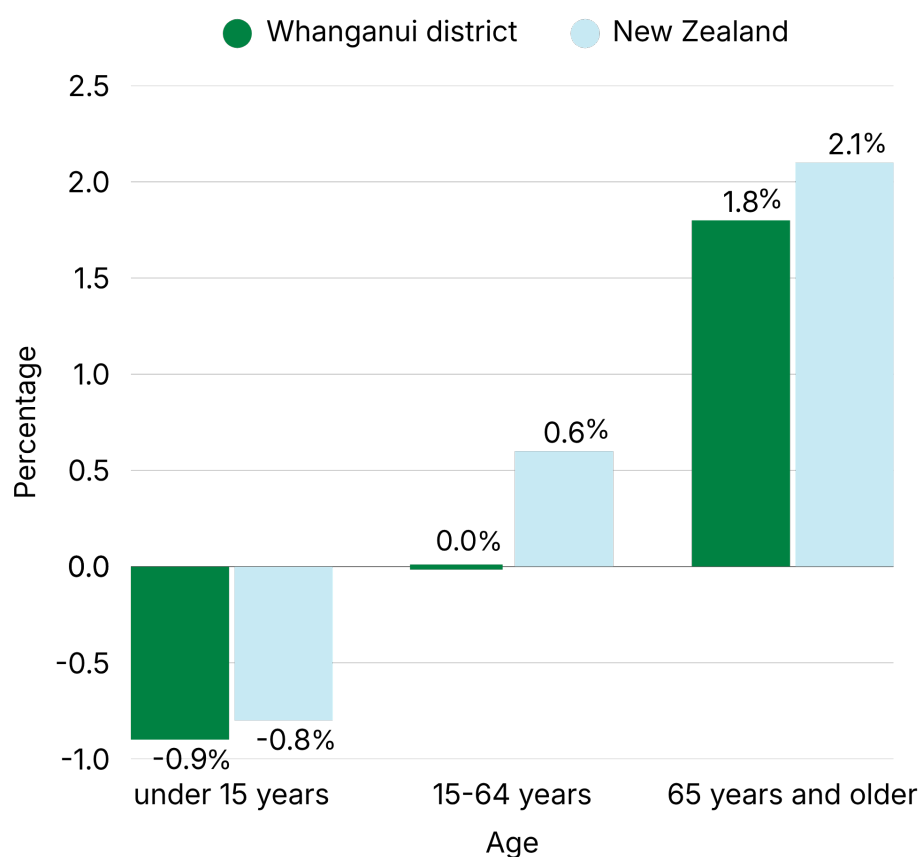
The 15–64 working-age population accounts for 58.7% of Whanganui's population, below the national average of 64.9%, and is projected to grow by 0.2% annually. Growth is limited because larger cohorts are ageing into the 65+ group faster than they are being replaced. Many residents currently entering the 65+ bracket

were born during periods of higher national birth rates, including the post-World War II baby boom, creating a naturally larger older population.

Migration patterns reinforce these trends. Young adults often leave the district for study and employment, while older adults are more likely to move here for lifestyle reasons.

Combined, these dynamics create strong growth in the older population, slow growth in working-age residents, and a gradual decline in the number of children.

Whanganui district projected population growth by age group 2025 - 2037



Source: Infometrics, 2025a

Key considerations for an ageing population

An ageing population brings both challenges and opportunities. Older residents typically use health services more frequently, including GP visits and hospital care, increasing demand on local health care providers. Housing and community infrastructure must also adapt, with smaller, warmer homes in well-connected neighbourhoods that are safe, accessible and supports mobility and independence.

At the same time, older residents contribute positively to the district. They participate actively in volunteering, local democratic processes and community life, strengthening social capital and community engagement.

Many residents aged 65 and over also continue to work, often through part-time roles, self-employment, contracting, or flexible arrangements. This reflects changing retirement patterns, rising living costs, and a desire to stay socially connected and purposeful.

Planning for an ageing population therefore requires balancing the increased demand on services with the opportunities presented by an engaged and experienced cohort, while ensuring the district remains attractive and accessible for all age groups.

Ethnic diversity

Whanganui's population profile shows higher proportions of both European (78.5%) and Māori residents (28.5%) compared with national averages. These two groups form the core of the district's cultural identity and continue to shape local community strengths, heritage, and social priorities.

In contrast, the district has smaller Pacific Peoples (4.1%) and Asian (5.1%) populations than New Zealand overall, where these groups are growing rapidly. Representation of Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African communities is also lower, at 0.6% compared with 1.9% nationally.

This pattern indicates that Whanganui is experiencing slower growth in newer migrant communities than many other parts of the country. While the district remains less ethnically diverse overall, the presence of multiple cultural groups still contributes to a varied community landscape and highlights opportunities to strengthen inclusion and cultural engagement over time.

Ethnic group	Whanganui district	New Zealand
European	78.3%	67.8%
Māori	28.5%	17.8%
Pacific Peoples	4.1%	8.9%
Asian	5.1%	17.3%
Middle Eastern/Latin American/African	0.6%	1.9%
Other	1.4%	1.1%

The table shows the percentage of people belonging to each ethnic group in the Whanganui district and New Zealand as at the 2023 census*

*Figures do not add up to 100% as more than one ethnic group can be selected.



Inflation index

Indicator	What it measures	2025 position
Consumer Price Index (CPI)	Household cost of living This puts pressure on households and affordability	3.1%
Producer Price Index (PPI)	Prices recieved/paid by producers This puts pressure on suppliers and contractors	3.5%
Capital Goods Price Index (CDPI)	Cost for construction and infrastructure Price of building work and capital inputs	1.2%
Local Government Cost Index (LGCI)	Cost faced by councils This puts pressure on council budgets, service levels and investment capacity.	Forecast 3.5% for 2026/27

Inflation continues to affect households, businesses, and councils, even though price increases are no longer as sharp as they were in recent years. In the year to December 2025, Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation was 3.1%, which is just above the Reserve Bank’s target range of 1–3%. CPI measures changes in the cost of living for households and reflects the prices people pay for everyday items such as rent, food, electricity, fuel, and transport. While inflation has slowed, prices have not gone back down, meaning households are still living with higher costs than before the pandemic.

For households, this means weekly expenses remain high and there is less money available for discretionary spending. Over time, higher living costs reduce households’ ability to cope with further increases, including increases in rates and fees. This has a flow-on effect for councils, as household affordability limits how much additional revenue can reasonably be raised from the community without causing financial stress.

Cost pressures are also present earlier in the supply chain. The Producer Price Index (PPI) measures the costs faced by businesses to produce goods and services. PPI inflation increased by 11% between 2021 and 2023, driven by supply chain disruptions, higher fuel and energy costs, construction pressures, and labour shortages. Since then, PPI has decreased and is currently sitting at a 3.5% increase. While these pressures have eased, the higher cost base has largely remained, continuing to influence the prices charged to both households and councils.

The Capital Goods Price Index (CGPI) provides a more direct view of costs for construction and infrastructure. It measures changes in the price of building work and capital inputs such as equipment. This is particularly relevant for councils, as it reflects the cost of delivering major projects like roads, water infrastructure, and public facilities. While price increases have slowed, costs remain elevated compared to pre-pandemic levels, meaning projects are more expensive to deliver even when scope has not changed.



For councils, CPI, PPI, and CGPI still do not fully reflect the mix of costs they face. Councils purchase a different basket of goods and services, including roading materials, pipes, construction services, fuel, energy, and labour. Because of this, inflation for local government is better measured using the Local Government Cost Index (LGCI), which is designed to reflect council spending patterns.

The LGCI shows that council costs tend to increase faster than CPI over time. The LGCI forecast for 2026/27 is around 3.5%, higher than household inflation. Even when inflation is relatively modest, these increases compound year on year. This means councils must spend more simply to maintain existing service levels, without any improvement or expansion.

The ability for councils to increase revenue is limited. Household affordability pressures and slow population growth in many areas constrain the size and pace of rate increases. This creates an ongoing challenge as costs continue to rise but income cannot increase at the same rate. Over time, this reduces financial flexibility and makes it harder to invest in new infrastructure, renew assets, or respond to emerging needs without increasing pressure on residents.

Overall, while inflation is no longer rising rapidly, it remains a long-term and compounding issue. For councils, the combination of higher living costs for households and higher operating and capital costs means careful financial planning is required to balance service delivery, investment, and affordability.



Whakatapu Grow

In this section

- Growth projections
- Projected population growth
- Projected household growth
- Income
- Projected employment growth
- Education capacity
- GP capacity
- Deprivation
- National and international economy
- Industry structure
- Gross domestic product
- Industry structure by gross domestic product
- Skills
- Unemployment and employment
- Social welfare support
- NEET rates

Growth projections

Medium growth assumptions and projected population growth

When preparing an environmental scan, the Council needs to work from a clear and consistent set of growth assumptions. Growth projections provide the baseline used to assess population size, age structure, household numbers, housing demand, and service needs. Using a single projection across all areas is important. It ensures that population, housing, and infrastructure are being assessed on the same basis, rather than mixing low and high assumptions across different parts of the organisation.

The council considered low, medium, and high growth projections and selected the medium projection as the most appropriate baseline for planning. Under the medium projection, Whanganui's population is expected to increase from around 49,200 in 2025 to approximately 50,900 by 2037, and to around 54,021 by 2057. This represents steady, moderate growth over the long term.

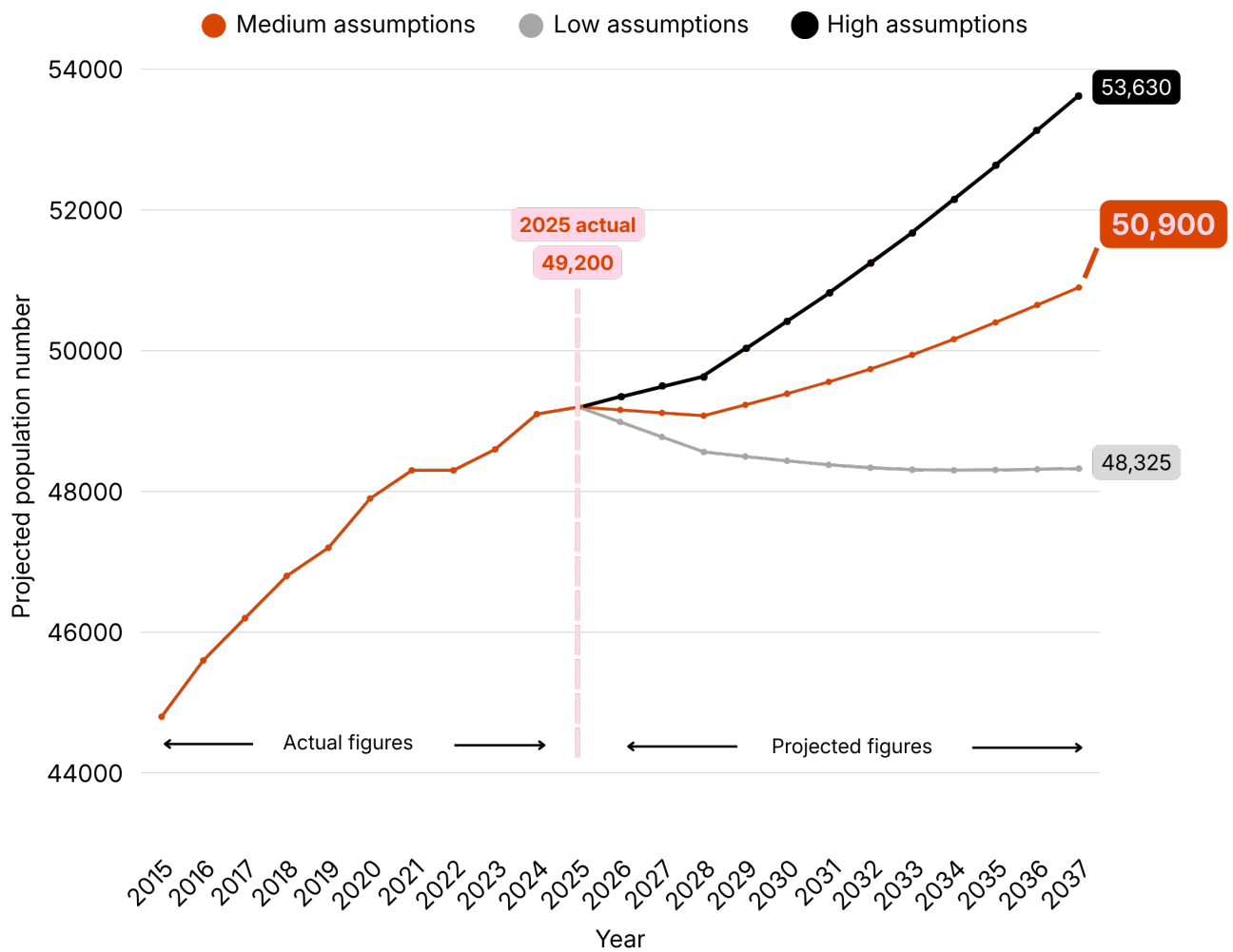
Recent population change has been modest, with an increase of around 0.2% (approximately 100 people) between June 2024 and June 2025, but the overall projection reflects a steady upward direction rather than decline.

Compared with earlier periods of stronger growth, the current outlook represents a consolidation phase that still maintains momentum and provides a stable foundation for future development.

Using the medium projection provides a balanced and realistic foundation for planning. It allows the council to assess future demand for infrastructure, services, and funding without relying on optimistic growth assumptions that may not occur. At the same time, it avoids the risks associated with planning for very low growth, which could leave the district underprepared if population growth is stronger than expected.

Choosing the medium projection does not set a population target or assume that growth will occur exactly as projected. Population projections are planning tools, not predictions. They are used to test demand, affordability, and infrastructure needs under a consistent set of assumptions. Actual growth may be higher or lower, and the council can adjust its planning over time as new information becomes available.

Whanganui district projected population growth from 2015 - 2037



Household growth

The District Plan already anticipates Whanganui's projected growth and provides capacity for new housing to be delivered over time. Land for both infill development and greenfield growth is zoned, meaning housing can be built now, subject to infrastructure servicing and site-specific requirements. This gives the council a strong starting position and avoids the need for major rezoning to respond to expected demand.

Household projections show continued growth through to 2037, with the number of households increasing from around 20,200 in 2025 to an estimated 21,400. This equates to around 1,180 additional households over 12 years, or approximately 95 to 100 new households per year. While this rate of growth is slower than the previous 12-year period, it still represents ongoing demand for new housing across the district.

The Strategy for Whanganui Rautaki mō Whanganui reinforces this direction. It focuses on building and supporting housing options that reflect the needs of the community, making better use of existing infrastructure, and prioritising infill development where

appropriate. The Strategy also recognises the importance of providing housing that is affordable, warm, and dry, and capable of responding to demographic change.

The planned delivery of around 1,000 new homes by 2037 through the council's housing initiatives, broadly aligns with projected household growth. In practice, it is actually lower than the previous five years' building consent trends, which suggests the district plan is not overstating likely demand. Instead, it provides a realistic framework for managing growth that is already occurring.

Importantly, housing availability alone will not determine whether growth outcomes are successful. Housing choice matters just as much as overall supply and the effectiveness of the District Plan will depend on whether the right types of homes are built, in the right locations, and at the right pace.

Overall, the district plan, supported by the Strategy for Whanganui provides capacity for growth. The challenge is not whether there is space to grow, but whether growth delivers housing that genuinely meets the needs of the community.

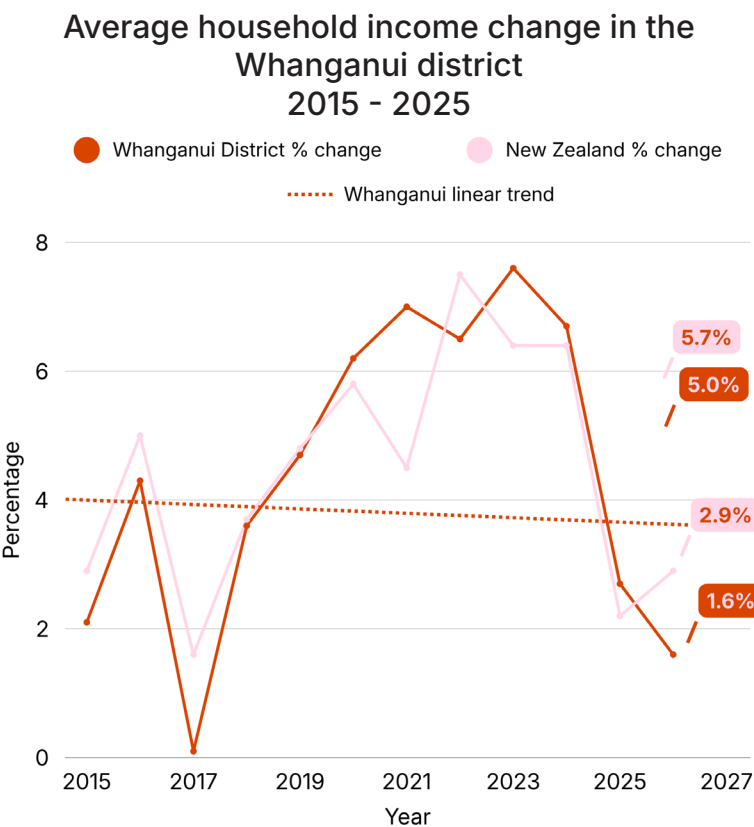
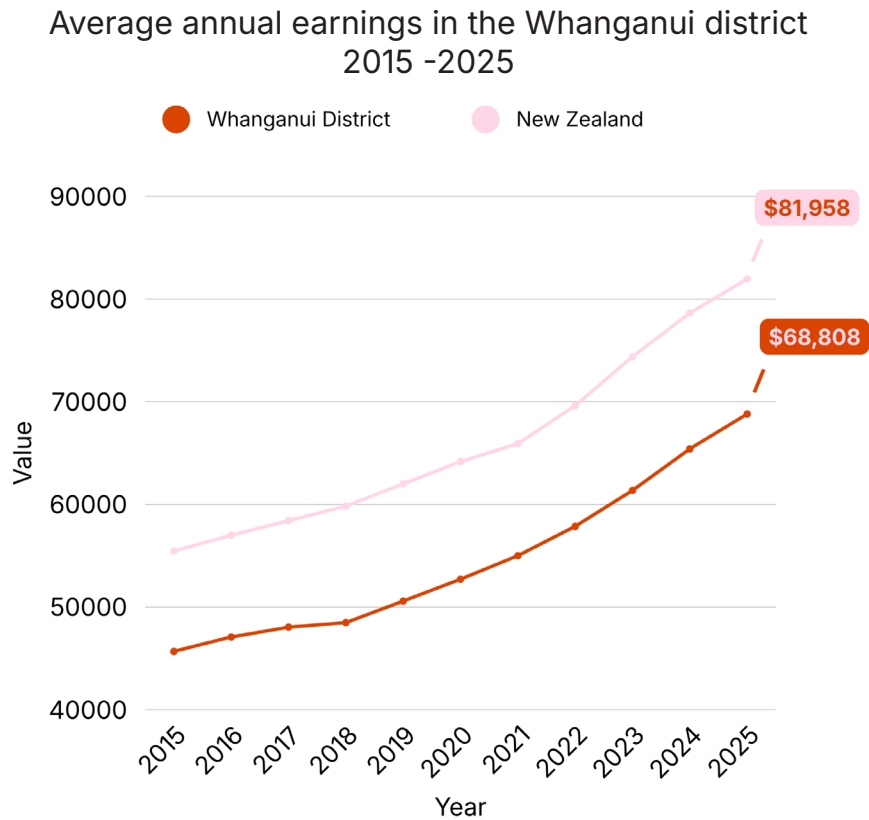
Income

Average annual earnings

As at March 2025, average annual earnings sat at \$68,808, representing a strong annual increase of 5.2%. However, this remains significantly below the national average of \$81,958, a difference of more than \$13,000.

This suggests that while employment growth and wage increases are occurring, the local economy remains weighted toward lower paying roles compared with the national profile.

Source: Infometrics, 2025c



Average household income

As at March 2026, Whanganui's average household income sits at \$110,157. Average household income is made up from multiple sources including earnings from employment, allowances, benefits and superannuation. By including incomes of all household members from a range of sources means it provides a more well-rounded measure of living standards and housing affordability than individual earnings. In 2026, Whanganui had the smallest annual increase it's had in five years at just 1.6%.

Per capita income

Per capita income is similar to average household income; however, it also takes into account the household's size. Simply, per capita income is calculated by dividing total household income by the homes population. Household size is an important consideration, as households with a similar household income may have considerably different living standards depending on how many individuals their income is shared among.

In Whanganui, per capita income is \$46,937, compared with the New Zealand average of \$57,350. This gap of almost \$10,000 highlights ongoing affordability and resilience challenges at the individual level.

As Whanganui's population continues to age, downward trends on per capita income is expected. A growing share of residents living on fixed or low incomes, such as superannuation, increases the number of people counted in the population who are not earning wages. Even if wages for those in work remain stable, a higher proportion of non-wage earners will lower average income measured per person. Over time, this reduces per capita income and highlights the importance of retaining and engaging people in the workforce, including older residents where possible, to support income levels and economic resilience.

What does all of this mean?

Household income matters because it influences a wide range of outcomes, including housing affordability, health and wellbeing, financial resilience, and the ability of households to participate in the local economy. Income growth also has implications for the council's long-term financial sustainability, as higher household incomes increase the community's capacity to absorb rates and support investment in services and infrastructure. Over time, increased household income can also flow into lower-income areas, lifting overall economic participation and resilience.

While the council does not control wages or private sector pay, it can influence the conditions that support income growth. This includes land-use planning that enables higher-value employment, investment in infrastructure that supports business productivity and growth, skills and education partnerships that strengthen local career pathways, and urban development that attracts and retains working-age households. Framing household income as a long-term outcome helps shift the focus from short-term job numbers to the broader question of how the district positions itself to improve economic wellbeing over the next 10 years.



AOTEAROA

korero o mua

HB

Employment growth

From 2022 to 2024, the district's economy has continued to grow, but at a steadily weakening rate. Growth declined to 0.9% in 2023, and then to just 0.1% in 2024. This level of growth is very low and signals that the local economy is close to stagnation rather than recovery.

Most local businesses are small and medium-sized enterprise, which are facing rising operating costs, high interest rates, and lower consumer spending. These pressures limit their ability to expand and reduce their capacity to hire. As a result, employment opportunities remain limited, particularly for young people, new residents, and those trying to re-enter the workforce.

Weak employment growth also has wider consequences. With fewer job opportunities, household incomes struggle to increase, population growth becomes harder to sustain, and local economic activity remains subdued.

Over time, this constrains the ratepayer base and reduces the council's financial capacity to maintain and improve services and infrastructure.

Overall, the current level of economic and employment growth is not sufficient to support Whanganui's long-term aspirations for population growth, economic resilience, or financial sustainability. Without deliberate action, there is a risk that low growth becomes the norm rather than a temporary phase.

Employment and the job sector are spoken on in depth further in the document.



Education capacity

Whanganui's education landscape is diverse, with primary, intermediate and secondary schools (including public, state-integrated and special character) supported by a network of private training establishments and industry training organisations such as UCOL/Te Pūkenga. (Whanganui and Partners, 2023). Many of the courses offered reflect Whanganui's economic strengths in manufacturing, agriculture and the creative sector. At the same time, education and training are spread across many providers, and the connections between study and local jobs are not always clear.

Education and training also influence whether people want to live, work and build a life in Whanganui. Strong and relevant learning pathways help attract and retain younger adults, skilled workers and creative talent. In sectors such as the creative industries, where direct employment opportunities are limited, local creatives can expand their career options through teaching and tutoring. This helps build local skills, supports a sustainable creative sector and strengthens the wider business capacity of the district.

Early childcare, primary and secondary education

In Whanganui, 96.5% of children are attending early childhood education (ECE), with participation increasing slightly for most groups from 2023 to 2024. In 2024, 555 children were enrolled in ECE. The number of children not attending ECE remains low, although there have been small rises among males and Māori tamariki. Attendance among European/Pākehā, Asian, Pacific, and female children continue at their regular levels.

Secondary school student enrolments in the district have stayed relatively stable over the past few years, with only minor fluctuations. Numbers rose gradually from 7,875 in 2022 to 8,171 in 2024, before a small dip to 8,138

in 2025. Overall, this shows a steady school-aged population with little year-to-year change rather than significant growth or decline. School attendance has increased and is now at 56.2%. While this improvement is encouraging, it shows that only just over half of our rangitahi are attending school regularly. Whanganui's attendance is broadly in line with the national average of 57.8%.

Current evidence suggests Whanganui has sufficient schooling capacity to support projected growth, with risks more likely to arise from asset quality and demographic change than from a lack of student places (Ministry of Education, 2025).

Tertiary education

As UCOL continues to play a critical role in workforce development, it is complemented by a network of Private Training Establishments (PTEs) in Whanganui, delivering sector-specific training in agriculture, hospitality, and business. These providers are increasingly adopting flexible models to respond to industry needs

and support lifelong learning. Collectively, this ecosystem underpins Whanganui's aspiration to align education with local labour market priorities and create pathways into higher-skilled employment.

GP capacity

Similar to our last district snapshot, the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners (2025) reports a severe national workforce shortage, with 42% of GPs expected to retire within the next five years and a further 18% considering moving overseas. This represents a potential loss of 60% of the national GP workforce.

As of June 2026, only three practices in Whanganui are accepting new patients, and

only for individuals without an existing GP in the region.

Earlier research found that one in three patients nationwide waited up to two weeks for an appointment (Hill, 2025). This shortage increases pressure on Whanganui Accident and Medical, although the service has adjusted its processes to continue meeting community needs (Whanganui Regional Health Network, 2023).

Waikato Medical School

In October 2025, Whanganui District Council joined the University of Waikato, Te Ranga Tupua Iwi Collective, Health New Zealand, and the Whanganui Regional Health Network in signing a Memorandum of Understanding to support Whanganui's consideration as a training site for the future New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine. If selected, Whanganui and its surrounding regions could host clinical placements for years two to four of the graduate entry programme.

Evidence shows that doctors who train in a region are more likely to stay, meaning this initiative has the potential to strengthen our long term GP and primary care workforce. This partnership continues to explore how Whanganui can provide a connected, supportive environment for future medical trainees.

Deprivation

Socioeconomic deprivation describes the degree of disadvantage experienced by people and communities. It is measured in New Zealand using the NZ Index of Deprivation (NZDep), which draws on census data to assess factors such as income, employment, housing quality, household crowding, access to transport, and education.

Higher levels of deprivation are linked with poorer health outcomes and greater exposure to environmental risks. For example, households in high-deprivation areas may struggle to afford warm, healthy homes, reliable transport, or timely access to healthcare, and may be more likely to live near industrial areas or busy transport routes. In Whanganui, around 66.6% of residents live in the three most deprived deciles (8-10), which is much higher than the national average of 30%

Suburb level data shows that there is a relationship with the higher NZDep scores and higher rates of assault, burglary, victimisation and crime overall.

In the Whanganui Central suburb, where the deprivation level is 10, there is an average of 1613 crimes per 1000 people and a total of 1099 crimes in the last 12 months. This makes for an average of three crimes a day in the area. A reason this is so high is because there is a small amount of population to spread the crime across and it includes retails and hospitality businesses.

Otamatea, on the other end of the scale, has a crime rate of six per 1000 people and has had only 11 crimes in the last 12 months. That equates to less than one every 30 days.

It's important to consider that these results are also at the top and bottom of the scale. Laird Park, which has a deprivation level of 10, have an average of 82 crimes per 1000 people and have had 182 crimes in the last 12 months. Springvale North have 17 per 1000 people and just 7 crimes in the last 12 months.

While deprivation can be considered a factor its important to understand that low deprivation does not guarantee low crime. Take Whanganui Central as an example. There are extenuating circumstances there that make it more vulnerable but are outside of the deprivation scale.

National data suggests that town centres and mixed-use areas often have higher crime rates regardless of deprivation because they

attract more people, cars, retail activity, and opportunistic offences.

*Research underpinning NZDep and the New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey consistently cautions against assuming a direct causal relationship between deprivation and crime. Deprivation increases exposure to risk, but does not determine individual behaviour.

There is more on crime in the Public Safety section further in the scan.

Suburbs	Decile rating
Ōtamatea	1
Brunswick Papaiti	2
Springvale North	2
Mowhanau	3
St Johns Hill West	4
Springvale East	5
Putiki	5
Kaitoke/Fordell	5
St Johns Hill East	5
Bastia/Durie Hill	5
Springvale West	6
Whanganui East (Riverlands)	8
Upper Aramoho	8
Gonville South	8

Suburbs	Decile rating
College Estate	8
Castlecliff West	9
Gonville North	9
Whanganui Central	9
Lower Aramoho	9
Whanganui East (Williams Domain)	9
Upper Whanganui	9
Castlecliff East	10
Gonville (Balgownie & West)	10
Titoki (Castlecliff)	10
Cornmarket (Whanganui Central)	10
Laird Park	10
Wembley Park (Whanganui East)	10

*NZDep assigns each mesh block a score from 1 to 10, where 1–3 indicates low deprivation, 4–7 medium deprivation, and 8–10 high deprivation.

National and international economy B

Global economic growth remains uneven, with many advanced economies adjusting to higher interest rates, inflation, and ongoing geopolitical uncertainty. Growth across key export markets, including China, Australia, Europe, and the United States, is expected to remain positive but more moderate than in previous decades. These conditions influence demand for New Zealand exports and contribute to greater uncertainty for export-oriented regional economies.

Global trade conditions are also becoming more complex, with increasing use of tariffs, trade restrictions, and domestic industry protection policies. Many countries are placing greater emphasis on supply chain resilience and domestic production, which may increase compliance costs and create barriers for exporters. These trends have the potential to create volatility in export demand and pricing, particularly for primary sector goods.

Whanganui has a strong export base, with a significant concentration in dairy products, meat, forestry, and other primary sector industries. These sectors are closely linked to international market conditions and global commodity demand. There is an increasing focus, both locally and nationally, on expanding value-added production to increase export returns, improve economic resilience, and reduce exposure to commodity price volatility. This aligns with New Zealand's broader export ambitions to grow higher-value food production, advanced manufacturing, and specialised products for international markets.

As global trade conditions evolve, supporting export-oriented industries and enabling the development of higher-value export activities will remain important to strengthening Whanganui's economic resilience and supporting long-term economic growth.

Whanganui district export profile

	Whanganui District		Provincial areas		New Zealand	
Goods type	Level	% of total	Level	Level	% of total	% of total
Milk and cream; concentrated or sweetened	\$397.0m	30.9%	\$7,045.4m	\$9,915.6m	15.0%	17.9%
Dairy products no otherwise included	\$279.3m	21.7%	\$1,515.2m	\$2,668.8m	4.0%	3.9%
Logs, whether or not stripped of bark, sapwood or roughly squared	\$153.9m	12.0%	\$2,683.2m	\$3,411.4m	5.2%	6.8%
Bovine meat (beef)	\$113.7m	8.9%	\$2,604.3m	\$4,391.4m	6.6%	6.6%
Sheep and goat meat	\$94.4m	7.3%	\$2,161.1m	\$3,644.3m	5.5%	5.5%
Natural fabrics including wool, skins, hair, hides and leather	\$61.7m	4.8%	\$492.6m	\$699.0m	1.1%	1.3%
Fresh kiwifruit and berries	\$44.5m	3.5%	\$1,809.1m	\$2,571.3m	3.9%	4.6%

Other food products - vegetables, fruit and animal preparations, oils and confectionary	\$31.9m	2.5%	\$1,229.5m	\$2,198.7m	3.3%	3.1%
Other natural exports including wood pulp, paper and live animals	\$15.0m	1.2%	\$1,060.4m	\$1,910.4m	2.9%	2.7%
Other meat including offal	\$14.9m	1.2%	\$365.7m	\$631.5m	1.0%	0.9%
Honey, eggs and other animal products	\$14.6m	1.1%	\$305.6m	\$437.3m	0.7%	0.8%
Manufactured articles including plastics, furniture and vehicles	\$11.0m	0/9%	\$107.0m	\$790.7m	1.2%	0.3%

Dairy products make up over half of Whanganui's total export value, with milk, cream, and other dairy products accounting for around 52% of export earnings. This means Whanganui's economy is highly exposed to movements in dairy prices. When the Farmgate milk price rises, more money flows directly to farmers and processors in and around the district, increasing spending on wages, services, equipment, and local suppliers.

Nationally, a high milk price injects billions of dollars into regional New Zealand, with the majority of that money circulating through rural districts rather than major cities. In contrast, when milk prices fall, farm spending tightens quickly, reducing cash flow across the wider local economy. Because Whanganui's export base is more concentrated in dairy than provincial and national averages, these price movements tend to have a disproportionate local impact (Fonterra, 2025).





Industry structure A

Industry structure by employment type

Industry structure is measured by how many people are employed in each industry, rather than the amount of revenue or GDP the industry generates for the district.

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment reports that 59.5% of Whanganui's working-age population is employed, which equates to approximately 17,183 people. Using this total, it is possible to estimate how many people are employed across different industries based on their share of employment.

Changes in industry employment are influenced by wider economic conditions, including employers' expectations about future activity and their capacity to create and sustain roles. In Whanganui, the overall industry structure is shaped by a small number of large industry groups, each supported by a limited range of dominant activities rather than a broad spread of sub-industries. Understanding what sits within each industry helps identify where employment is concentrated and where the district may be more exposed to economic change.



Industry structure by employment type

Healthcare and social assistance (16.4% of employment)

This is the district's largest employment sector and is strongly anchored by hospital services and aged care.

These numbers reflect the district's ageing population and steady demand for care-based services.

Manufacturing (12.6%)

Manufacturing in Whanganui is highly concentrated rather than diverse.

- Meat and meat processing is the dominant contributor at 3.2%
- Textiles, leather, clothing and footwear follow at 1.8%, a distant second

This concentration means manufacturing is closely tied to primary production and export markets, bringing both strong employment opportunities.

Retail Trade (10.2%)

Retail employment reflects everyday household needs as well as construction and lifestyle spending.

- Supermarkets are the largest contributor at 3.3%
- Hardware and building supplies account for 1.46%, linking retail activity to construction and housing trends.
- "Other retail" (including department stores, clothing, and pharmacies) fills out much of the remaining employment.

This mix suggests retail activity is driven more by necessity rather than 'wants' spending.

Construction (10.0%)

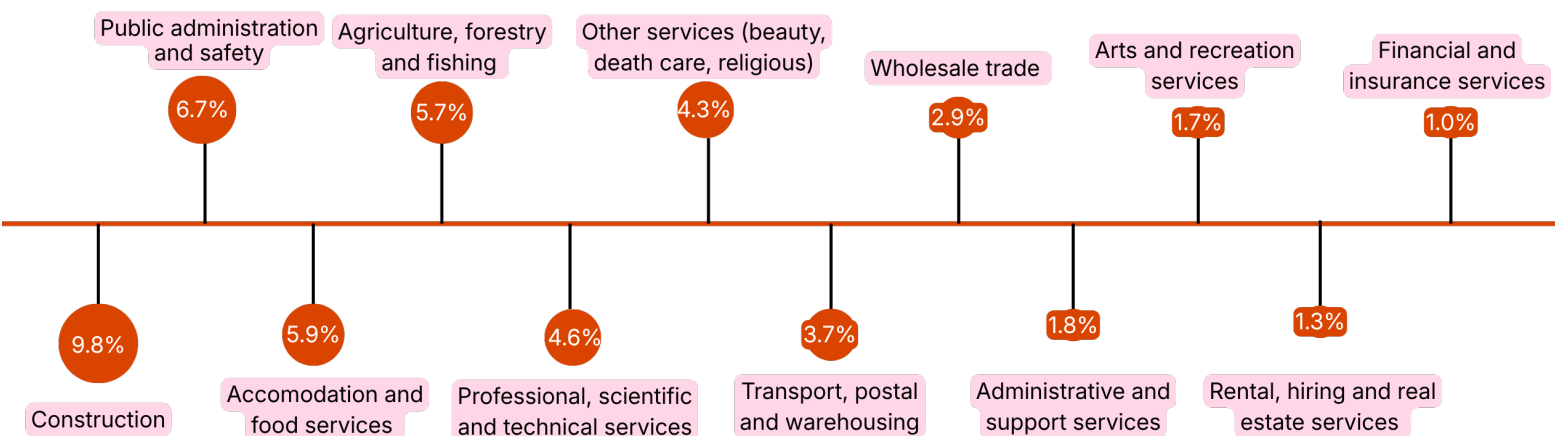
Construction employment is led by core building activity, rather than specialist trades.

- General construction services dominate at 5.6%.
 - Electrical services are the largest specialist contributor (1.14%), followed by site preparation, painting and decorating, and plumbing.
-

Education and training (9.8%)

Education employment is weighted toward early and compulsory education.

- Primary education is the largest contributor at 3.83%.
- Secondary education follows at 2.28%, with preschool education at 1.56%.
- Tertiary education contributes a small share at 0.53%.



Business confidence

Business confidence in Whanganui is cautious and uneven. While there are still signs of investment and some sectors continue to perform reasonably well, the wider business environment is clearly under pressure. Softer consumer demand, rising costs, and ongoing uncertainty are making it harder for many businesses to trade confidently.

Consumer spending patterns point to a difficult operating environment, particularly for retail and other discretionary sectors. Households remain price-sensitive and selective, and for many, spending is increasingly limited to essentials. This is contributing to patchy performance across the local economy and is likely one reason why some businesses are struggling to stay viable.

Whanganui continues to attract spending from outside the district, which provides an important source of support for hospitality, accommodation, and visitor-related activity. However, this should not be read as a sign that the local economy is broadly strong. External spending helps offset weaker local demand, but it does not remove the pressure facing businesses that rely heavily on day-to-day household spending.

Business numbers and investment activity suggest there is still some underlying confidence in the district, particularly where businesses are aligned with local strengths or longer-term opportunities. However, that confidence appears selective rather than broad-based. It is not being felt evenly across the business community.

CBD vacancies remain a visible sign of this pressure. While some vacancies will reflect normal turnover, building constraints, or changing space needs, the number of empty shops also points to a tougher commercial environment and reduced demand for some premises. In that sense, vacancies are not just a property issue — they are also a signal that parts of the local economy are finding it hard to sustain activity at previous levels.

Overall, the business environment in Whanganui is better described as constrained than confident. There is still enough activity to avoid a picture of outright decline, but the district is not insulated from wider economic pressures.

Gross Domestic Product

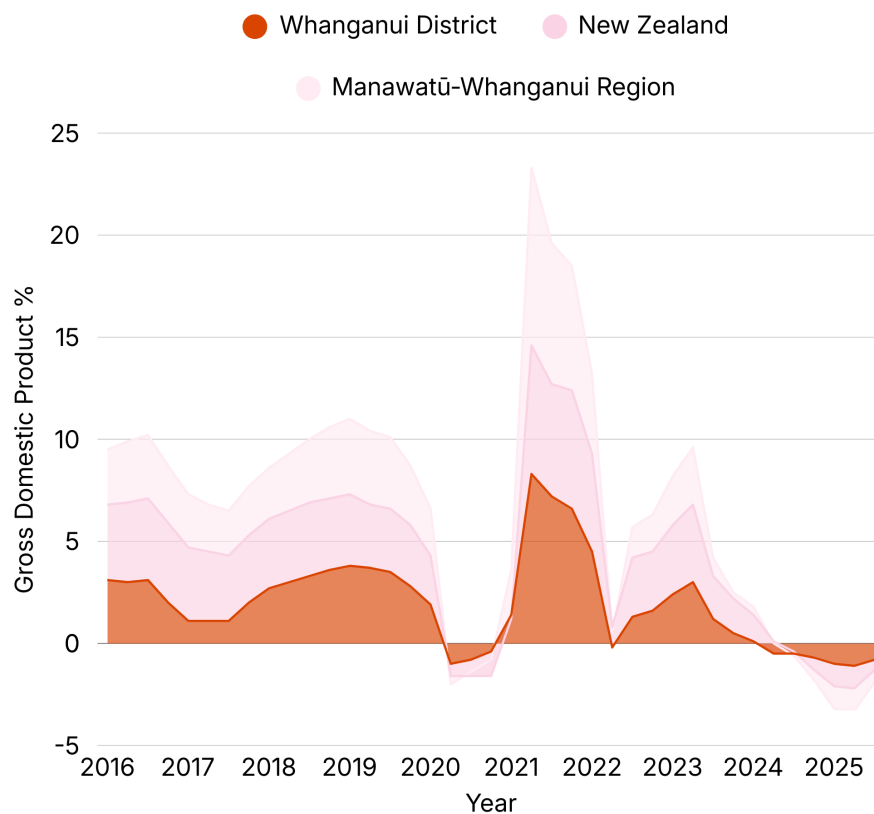
Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a key indicator of a region's economic performance, representing the total value of all goods and services produced in a year. In the year September 2024 to September 2025, Whanganui district's GDP was estimated at \$2,578 million, a decline of 0.8% compared to the previous year. This fall was higher than the national rate of -0.5% and reflects the broader economic slowdown affecting New Zealand.

Whanganui's economy has not seen positive growth since January 2024 and has declined by a total of 4.6% over the past 24 months. Over

this period, national GDP has also slowed, but many urban centres continue to experience growth.

Looking forward, improving economic performance is essential not only to increase local jobs and business capacity but also to make Whanganui a place where people want to live, invest, and raise families. Strengthening key sectors, supporting innovation, and linking education and training to local employment can help reverse the recent decline and position the district for sustainable growth.

Gross Domestic Product in Whanganui, New Zealand and Manawatū-Whanganui 2016 -2025

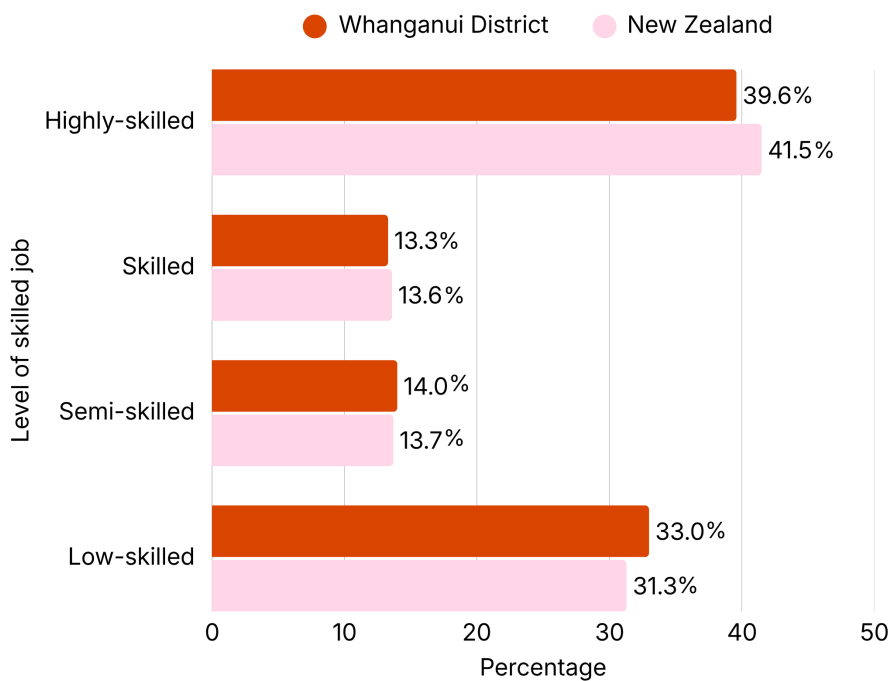


Source: (Infometrics, 2025d)

Industry structure breakdown
by Gross Domestic Product contribution
Year to March 2025

1.  **Healthcare and social assistance**
\$294.4m
11.6%
\$104,000 GDP generated per employee
2.  **Manufacturing**
\$261.2m
10.3%
\$121,000 GDP generated per employee
3.  **Agriculture, forestry and fishing**
\$225.6m
8.9%
\$134,000 GDP generated per employee
4.  **Construction**
\$189.8m
7.5%
\$108,000 GDP generated per employee
5.  **Retail trade**
\$177.4m
7.0%
\$103,000 GDP generated per employee

Skilled jobs in the Whanganui district



Source: (Infometrics, 2026a)

Across skill levels, Whanganui’s job profile differs slightly from the national picture. The district has a lower proportion of highly skilled jobs compared to the national rate. This indicates fewer roles that require advanced qualifications, specialist expertise, or professional accreditation. Highly skilled jobs typically include professions such as engineers, health professionals, teachers, ICT specialists, managers, and technical trades at an advanced level. These roles often attract higher wages, provide greater job stability, and are more resilient to economic change, but they are not the sole measure of a healthy local economy.

At the other end of the spectrum, low skilled roles make up a larger share of Whanganui’s labour market than nationally. These roles are commonly found in sectors such as manufacturing, logistics, hospitality, retail, and entry level service occupations. While lower skilled jobs are essential to the functioning of the local economy and provide important employment opportunities, a heavier reliance on them can influence average income levels, workforce vulnerability during economic downturns, and the ongoing need for accessible training and upskilling pathways.

It is also important to recognise that skill classifications do not always reflect the real value, complexity, or social importance of work. Many roles labelled as “low skilled” require significant experience, practical expertise, and interpersonal skills, and are critical to keeping local industries and services operating. A strong local economy therefore depends not only on increasing the number of highly qualified roles, but on improving job quality, pay, and progression opportunities across all parts of the workforce.

Institutions such as UCOL play an important role in bridging this skills mix. By providing locally accessible vocational, technical, and applied professional education, UCOL supports workforce development that aligns with Whanganui’s existing industries while also enabling progression into higher skilled roles. This includes training for health, trades, construction, engineering technologies, business, and emerging skill areas. Over time, this helps strengthen local labour supply, supports business growth, and creates pathways for residents to access better paid, and more secure, employment without needing to leave the district.

Unemployment

A

In 2025, unemployment reached 5.6% compared with 5% nationally. Māori unemployment in Whanganui sits at 11.1%, noticeably higher than the national Māori unemployment rate of 9.7%. These two trends suggest growing pressure in the local labour

market, with fewer job opportunities and businesses becoming more cautious about hiring. The recent rise highlights increased economic strain in the district compared with the rest of New Zealand.

Employment

A

Employment growth in Whanganui is actually on the decline, with a change of -0.9% from the previous year (2024). At this stage, New Zealand is also facing a decline in employment, with the national rate sitting at -1.1%.

The annual change in Māori employment in Whanganui is also declining, though slightly less than the regular employment rate at -0.7%. Nationally, Māori employment has decreased by a discouraging -2.2%. These

numbers are not good for a district that wants to grow and are a steep decline from the 3.1% growth and the 7.4% growth we saw in 2022, respectively.

A drop of this size suggests local factors such as fewer job opportunities, skill-job mismatches, or sector shifts are having a strong impact on people in the district. It reinforces the need to understand what is driving the local decline, especially given the national trend is stable or improving.

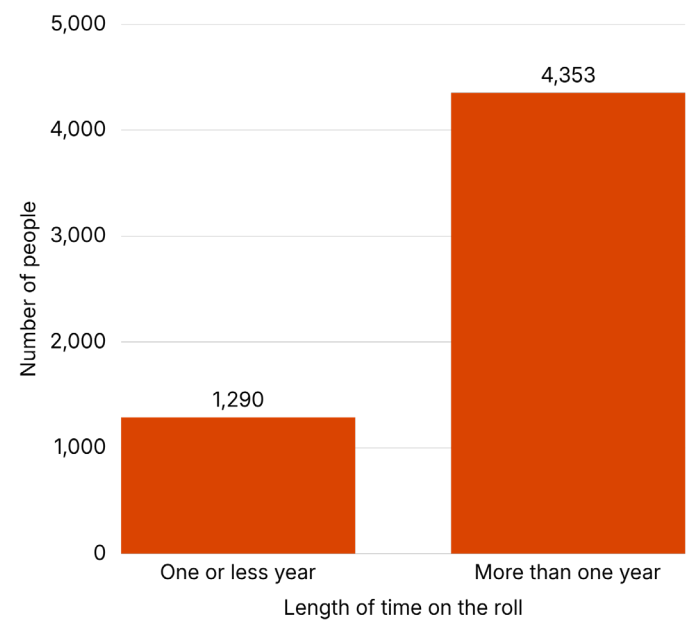


Social Welfare support

As at March 2026, Ministry of Social Development data shows 5,643 people in Whanganui receiving main benefits.

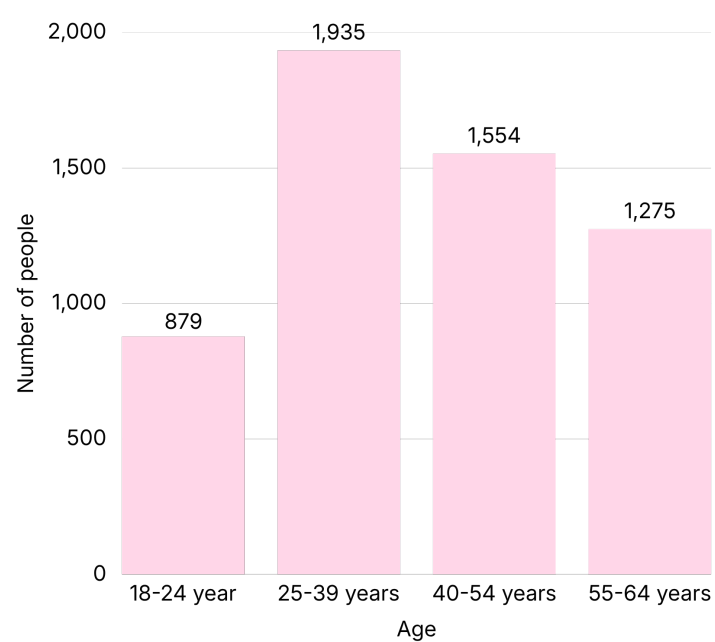
Source: (Ministry of Social Development, 2026c)

Length of time on the MSD register



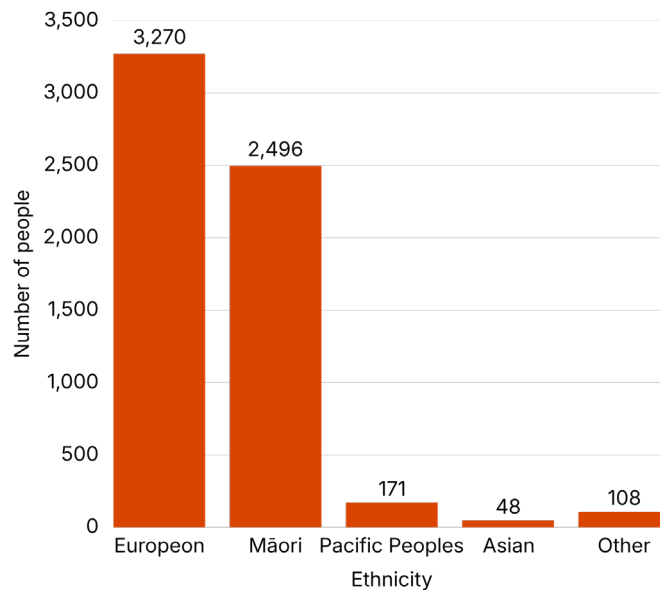
A large proportion of these recipients are long-term. Around 4,353 people have been receiving a benefit for more than one year, compared with 1,290 people for one year or less. This indicates that benefit reliance is not just short-term and reflects ongoing challenges in the local labour market, including barriers to sustained employment and pathways into work.

Age of those on the MSD register



The age profile shows the highest number of recipients in the 25–39 age group, which represents a core working-age cohort. This pattern suggests that workforce participation challenges are not limited to younger people entering the workforce, but are also present among adults who would typically be expected to be in stable employment.

Ethnicity of those on the MSD register



*Other contains Middle Eastern/Latin American/African

By ethnicity, European and Māori residents make up the largest share of recipients, with European recipients being the largest group overall, followed by Māori. Smaller numbers are recorded for Pacific peoples, Asian, and other groups. This broadly reflects the district's population profile but still highlights the scale of reliance across the community.

Overall, the data points to a combination of short-term pressures and longer-term structural challenges, reinforcing the importance of improving access to employment, strengthening pathways into work, and supporting sustained workforce participation.

Jobseeker support

This benefit supports people who are looking for work but are currently unemployed or working very few hours.

2394 people

1041 people

Sole parent support

This is provided to parents who are the main caregiver for their children and need financial assistance while caring for their family.

Supported living payment

This benefit helps people who cannot work due to illness, injury, or disability, or who care for someone who cannot work.

2172 people

96 people

Other main benefits

This includes less common forms of financial support for people who do not fit into the categories above.



NEET (not engaged in education, employment or training) rates

NEET rates measure the proportion of young people aged 15-24 that are not in education, employment or training.

The Whanganui NEET rates have increased to reach 33.8% as of September 2025. This is a huge difference to the New Zealand average of 12.9%. NEET rates in Whanganui has been on a sharp increase in the last two years, however in this last 12 months, they are holding in the 33% range. This signals a sustained level of disengagement from employment, education, or training.

In addition to economic pressures such as living costs and limited entry-level job

opportunities, broader generational trends may also be influencing why these rates are so high. Research shows many younger workers value meaningful work, personal development, autonomy, and work-life balance, and these preferences can affect their approach to employment and training pathways. Gen Z in particular places strong emphasis on work that aligns with their goals and wellbeing, and on flexibility and purposeful roles rather than simply taking any available job (Urgal et al., 2023).

Understanding these changing expectations can help inform targeted support that reconnects young people with pathways into work, education, and training.

Waihanga Build

In this section

- Housing
- Owned affordability
- Rental affordability
- Household size
- Building consent trends
- Social housing
- Affordable housing shortage
- Housing quality
- Ministry of Social Development register
- Housing provider
- Food insecurity
- Infrastructure capacity
- Roading
- Te Puwaha - Whanganui's Port revitalisation
- Local Water Done Well - Water services council controlled organisation

Housing affordability (owned)

Housing affordability in Whanganui sits around the middle compared to other districts in the Manawātū-Whanganui region. The average house value is \$465,093, which is about 4.6 times the average household income, or 10.6 times the average income per capita. Palmerston North and Manawātū sit slightly above this, with ratios of 4.7 and 4.5 to household income, and 11.7 and 11.2 to per capita income.

Although house prices have eased in recent years, they remain high compared to what people earn. This means home ownership is

still out of reach for many households without taking on significant debt.

When buying a home becomes less affordable, fewer people are able to move into ownership and more remain in the rental market. This keeps demand for rentals higher for longer. Renters also tend to spend a larger share of their income on housing, so affordability pressures can continue even when house prices stabilise or fall.

Rental affordability

Average weekly rent in Whanganui was \$486 in 2025, which is below the national average. However, rent still takes up around 25% of the average weekly household income, compared with 22% nationally. This shows that, relative to what people earn, renting is more expensive in Whanganui than it might first appear.

Looking at income on a per person basis (per capita) gives a different view again. This measure can better reflect renting households, where income is often shared across multiple people. In Whanganui, average weekly per capita income is around \$843. At this level, rent equates to approximately 57.7% of income.

This is the highest in the region, with the next closest being Ruapehu District at 52.5%. It highlights the extent of rental pressure locally, particularly for individuals or households with fewer income earners.

At these levels, a large portion of income is going towards housing, leaving less available for other essentials, savings, or unexpected costs. This can reduce financial resilience for households and limit how much money is spent within the local economy.

Household size

*All numbers are approximations.

Whanganui's housing stock is dominated by three-bedroom homes. In 2023, there were 18,700 occupied private homes in the district. (Note: 20,600 dwellings in the district. 4% are unoccupied). Of these 8,800 were three-bedroom homes, which is 47% of the total stock. A further 3,600 were four-bedroom homes and 1,000 had five or more bedrooms. This means around 72% of Whanganui's occupied dwellings had three or more bedrooms. By comparison, the one-bedroom and two-bedroom homes, make up 28% of the stock.

At the same time, household sizes are getting smaller. One-person households made up 30% of all households, while one-family households made up 58%. What stands out is that many smaller households are still living in larger homes. Of the one-person households, nearly 49% were living in homes with three or more bedrooms.

Couples without children show a similar pattern, with almost 80% living in dwellings with three or more bedrooms.

That suggests the issue is not simply the number of homes, but the fit between household size and actual house size. A large part of Whanganui's housing portfolio is made up of homes designed for larger households, while a growing share of households are now made up of one person or smaller family units. This can mean some households are staying in homes that are larger than they need, not necessarily by choice, but because there are limited smaller or more suitable options available. As at June 2026, we have a housing survey out in the district that is exploring the reasons why.

At the same time, that does not mean everyone has plenty of space. The overcrowding data shows that 4,800 residents in occupied private dwellings, were living in crowded households, meaning at least one more bedroom was needed. Within that group, 1,800 people were living in severely crowded households, meaning two or more additional bedrooms were needed.

This is where the data becomes more useful. Whanganui has both under-use and crowding in the same housing system. On one side, a substantial number of smaller households are living in larger homes. On the other, some households still do not have enough space.

In practice, overcrowding can mean children sharing bedrooms longer than expected, teenagers and adults lacking privacy, or households using lounges and other living spaces as sleeping areas. So the housing issue is not just supply. It is also whether the district has the right mix of homes for the people living in them.

The crowding data also shows that pressure is not shared evenly. Crowding is highest among children under 15 and those aged 15–29 (18.1%), while much lower for those aged 65 and over (2.6%).

By ethnicity, 23.5% of Māori and 29.0% of Pacific peoples were living in crowded households, compared with 7.8% of Europeans.

Building consent trends

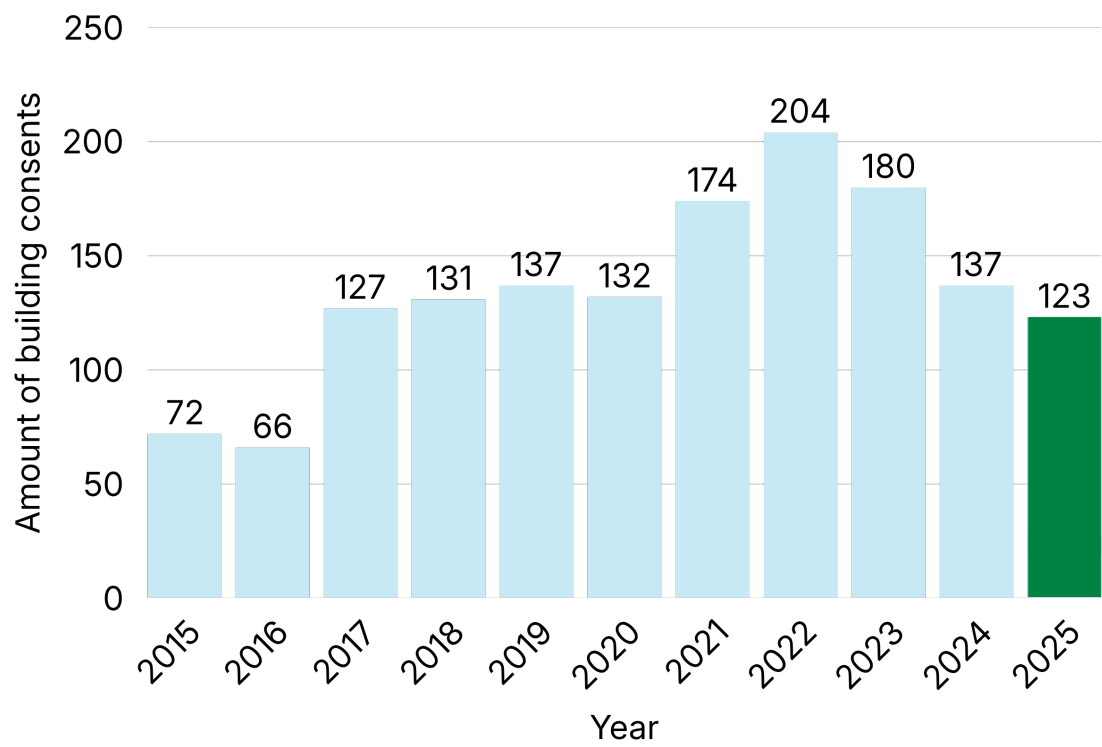
Monitoring building consents for new builds helps us understand how much additional housing is being added to the district and how prepared we are to support future population growth. As seen in the household growth assumptions, Whanganui’s District Plan accounts for all of these future assumptions.

The graph shows a noticeable surge in consents during 2021 and 2022, followed by a steady decline in the years since. While activity has tapered off from that peak, consent numbers still sit well above the levels originally projected for 2025 (99). This suggests that, despite the recent slowdown, Whanganui has added more new housing in recent years than expected, strengthening overall capacity.

The graph focuses only on new build consents, which represent one part of overall development activity. In practice, the council issued a total of 777 building consents in the calendar year of 2025, covering a wider range of work including alterations, additions, and other non-new-build projects.

This highlights that building activity across the district is broader than what is shown in new build data alone, and that demand on consenting capacity and regulatory services remains high even as new build numbers ease from recent peaks.

New build building consents in Whanganui
2015 - 2025



Social Housing

Affordable housing shortage

The demand for affordable and social housing is outstripping supply. Rental affordability is worsening and many homes do not meet modern warm, dry, healthy housing standards.

Discussions with Kāinga Ora (KO) highlight that demand for housing in Whanganui is heavily skewed toward one bedroom units. These are the most sought after homes, largely driven by an ageing population and a high number of single people, particularly single men. This local demand pattern aligns with national trends where smaller households are in high demand.

KO currently manages 597 public housing units in Whanganui. Rent is income controlled, with tenants paying 25% of their income toward housing, which helps limit rent stress for households with very low or fixed incomes. While rent in the private market is also benchmarked at around 25% of income, this comparison does not reflect the different income levels of households in social housing. For many KO tenants, the cost of private rentals remains unaffordable.

As at February 2026, there were 256 people on the KO housing register waiting for affordable housing in Whanganui, with 162 of those seeking a one bedroom unit. This level of unmet demand highlights a clear mismatch between the type of housing available and the type of housing needed.

From a delivery perspective, the housing system itself reinforces this imbalance. The additional cost to build a two bedroom home compared to a one bedroom unit is relatively small, meaning two bedroom homes are more commonly built because they are more economical. As a result, supply continues to favour larger units even though demand is strongest at the smaller end of the market.

The demographic profile of Whanganui further compounds these pressures. Around 35% of homes are occupied by households with children under 18, while 27% are occupied by people aged over 65. Around 10% of housing is overcrowded, indicating that some households are already making compromises due to limited options. At the same time, 23% of households are in long-term tenures of over two years, suggesting limited movement within the housing system.

Across the 1219 KO customers who are either housed or on the register in Whanganui, 51% are aged 55 or over. This confirms that demand is increasingly concentrated among older residents, many of whom have limited ability to adjust their housing circumstances. Māori make up the largest share of KO households at 53%, followed by European households at 44%.



Accommodation supplement

Work and Income provides an accommodation supplement to help people on lower incomes cover the cost of rent.

However, Whanganui faces a challenge under the way this support is structured. The country is divided into four “areas”, with different maximum supplement rates based on average rental costs. For example, a solo parent with one child in Area 1 can receive up to \$235 per week, while someone in the same situation in Area 4 can receive up to \$80. These differences are meant to reflect how expensive it is to rent in each area.

Whanganui is currently classified as Area 4, meaning residents receive the lowest level of support. This does not align well with current local housing costs. The average rent for an affordable housing unit in Whanganui is around \$411 per week. If a solo parent receives the maximum \$80 accommodation supplement alongside their main benefit, there is still a shortfall of more than \$100 per week.

This gap places ongoing financial pressure on lower-income households and increases the risk of housing stress, even in a district considered “more affordable” than others. Work is currently underway within the councils Community Development team to advocate for Whanganui to be reclassified into a more appropriate area, so that local residents can access support that better reflects real housing costs. (Ministry of Social Development, 2026)

Housing quality (mould, dampness, heating)

Moisture and mould remain noticeable housing challenges in parts of the Whanganui district. Most households report living in dry homes (79.9%), but a meaningful share still experience dampness either some of the time or consistently (17.5%).

Mould follows a similar pattern. While many homes are largely mould-free or only have small patches (84.3%), a significant number report mould larger than an A4 sheet (11.6%), either occasionally or on a regular basis.

These challenges point to ongoing issues with insulation, ventilation, and the overall age and condition of the local housing stock.

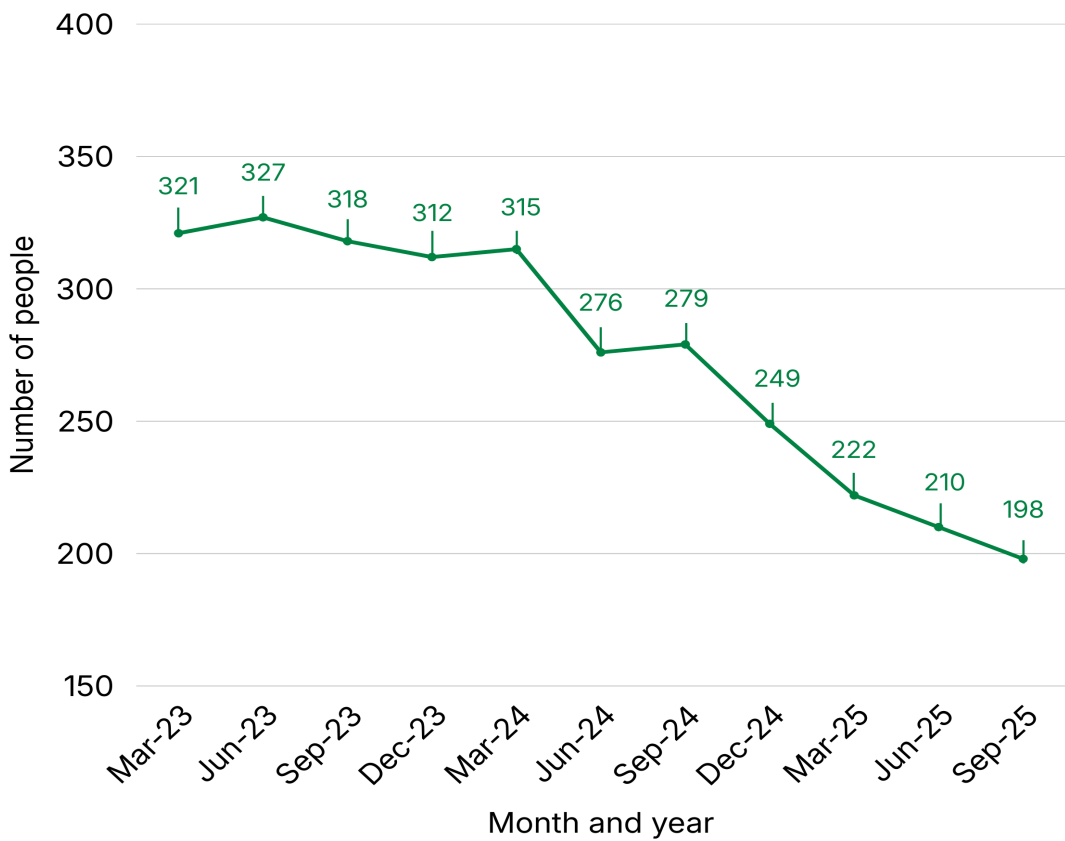
Heating in the Whanganui district shows a strong mix of both modern and traditional approaches. Heat pumps remain the most commonly used source of heating, but their uptake is noticeably lower than the national trend. Many households continue to rely on electric heaters and wood burners, reflecting the district’s older housing stock. Gas heaters - both fixed and portable - are also used more often here than in many parts of the country. Overall, the data indicate a diverse heating profile, with many households still depending on more traditional or supplementary heating methods to keep homes warm.

Ministry of Social Development (MSD) register

At November 2025, there were 198 individuals or families on the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) Housing Register. The figure below demonstrates the pattern of people on the MSD housing register.

*MSD’s housing register shows part of the picture but not the full demand. It only includes people who meet MSD criteria, excludes those seeking help from other providers, and counts applicants rather than their families. As a result, the true number of residents needing social or emergency housing in Whanganui is likely higher than the register suggests.

Number of people on the MSD housing register 2023-2025



Housing provider

Whanganui District Council is taking a long-term view on housing. The scale and complexity of what's needed - more homes, more partnerships, more sustained investment - calls for a dedicated entity built specifically for that purpose.

The new proposed independent housing initiative separates housing delivery from day-to-day council operations, giving it the focused mandate, flexible governance, and funding structures needed to respond to housing need over generations, not electoral cycles. It will hold and actively grow Whanganui's housing assets, taking a longer view on renewal, development timing, and housing mix.

A core principle of the initiative is partnership. Grounded in local values and working in collaboration with mana whenua, community providers, central government agencies, and the private sector, the entity can access capability, funding, and delivery pipelines that fall outside what the council can achieve alone. This is about working together because the gap between what's needed and what's available can only be closed collectively.

Guided by its founding purpose and the values of the community it serves, the entity will hold itself to clear commitments - to partners, to mana whenua, and to the people of Whanganui who need housing most. Independence does not mean distance from community values - it means the freedom to pursue them with greater focus and staying power.

For Whanganui's future, this model offers a lasting way to grow housing supply, manage financial risk, and build the delivery capacity our community deserves.



Food insecurity

Global food insecurity has continued to grow over the past two years, and we were not immune to it here in Whanganui. Driven by a combination of rising living costs, housing pressures, and ongoing supply challenges, this has placed increasing strain on low- and middle-income households.

A report done by the New Zealand Food Network in 2025 has shown that 33% of New Zealand households have experienced some form of food insecurity in the last 12 months (New Zealand Food Network, 2025).

Food insecurity isn't limited to low income households. Whanganui is noticing a growing population in working families needing support.

Local providers, including food banks, community kitchens, and kai initiatives, report a sustained demand for support. However, a lot of them are expressing that they could cater more if they had more food to offer.

For Whanganui, persistent food insecurity highlights the importance of community-based food systems, local growing initiatives, and accessible support services.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure capacity

The water network has adequate capacity for urban intensification; however, due to changes in drinking water regulations, the council are installing new treatment capacity to implement multi-barrier protection measures at our source water supply facilities.

The urban wastewater network broadly has capacity for the next 10 years of growth, but it does not perform adequately during wet weather events. This occurs due to groundwater infiltrating the wastewater network, non-compliant connections, the inadequacy of the stormwater network during significant events, leakage, network configuration, and lack of storage capacity

in the network. Hydraulic modelling has been undertaken, and the council have embarked on a long-term improvement programme to reduce spillages from the wastewater network during significant wet weather events.

The council will continue our long-term programme to improve the performance and service delivery of our stormwater network. This work is intended to reduce the level of flooding in the service area during increasingly common wet weather events and provide resilience to our community due to the projected effects of climate change.

Roading



Roading is a critical area where costs continue to rise, and ongoing investment is essential to maintain safety and resilience. Currently, New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi's funding assistance rate for road maintenance sits at 62%, meaning local contributions and developer funding play a significant role in supporting growth.

We are also seeking added funding for Structures in the Present Value End of Life (PVEoL) processes through NZTA, and other requests via Crown Resilience or Pothole Prevention contestable funds. Added funding is also being sought via MBIE or other sources for projects such as the Mountains to Sea trail. This is to where possible access funding outside of local contributions and developer funding.

What's happening now?

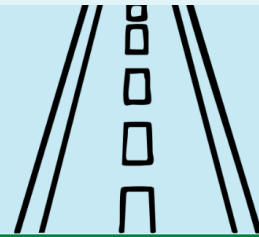
One project that residents can easily follow is the new subdivision development off Fitzherbert Avenue. Bringing a subdivision to life is more than just laying asphalt, it's a coordinated effort involving design, drainage, utilities, and connectivity. Before the first car drives down a new street, engineers have spent months planning pavement strength, stormwater management, and safe access points.

It's a story of turning paddocks into thriving neighbourhoods, and every step requires collaboration between developers, council, and contractors. Applications for funding are in process for Wakefield, Aramoho and Dublin Street bridges each with its own drivers and challenges.

Upcoming challenges

- Emergency works: Storm events and unexpected failures continue to strain the network, requiring rapid response and significant investment.
- Rising costs: Inflation and increased material, plant, and labour costs make maintaining current service levels challenging. These pressures are not expected to ease.
- Structures: Aging structures need higher maintenance and renewal funding. The aging structures are not only bridges but retaining walls on the rural network and major culverts across the network.
- Forestry impacts: Heavy harvesting traffic accelerates road wear, adding to maintenance costs. Forecasting this is difficult and require unplanned funding to address the issues caused.
- Under-investment: Past funding gaps in pavement renewals have led to deterioration, requiring catch-up investment.
- Climate resilience: More funding is needed for drainage and resilience projects to protect against extreme weather.
- Footpaths: Maintaining safe, accessible footpaths remains a priority, especially in urban areas. Recently The council has increased the unsubsidised funding for footpaths due to the NZTA subsidised active transport work category being reduced in this triennium.

600.75km
of sealed roads



271.00km
of unsealed roads

92
bridges



357.37km
footpaths

11,047
signs



Te Pūwaha - Whanganui's Port revitalisation



The council is in an information-gathering and advisory phase as an independent review of the Whanganui Port is undertaken. While this work is ongoing, a package of essential maintenance and renewal works has been identified to begin over the remainder of 2026. These works are required regardless of the future direction of the Marine Precinct and are focused on

managing immediate health and safety, environmental, site access and asset protection requirements. They will help ensure the port remains safe and operational while longer-term decisions are considered.

Local Water Done Well Water Services Council Controlled Organisation



The Local Government (Water Services Preliminary Arrangements) Act 2024 required all councils to prepare a Water Services Delivery Plan (WSDP) and submit it to the Secretary for Local Government by 3 September 2025. Councils had to consult on at least two options for how water services could be delivered in the future, choose a preferred option, and adopt a plan that met the requirements set out in law.

In August 2025, Whanganui District Council decided to partner with Ruapehu District Council to create a joint Water Services Council Controlled Organisation (WS-CCO), using a local pricing model. The WSDP was prepared on this basis and approved by the Secretary for Local Government in November 2025, confirming it met all legislative and financial sustainability requirements.

The new WS-CCO will be responsible for delivering drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services to around 25,000 water connections across both districts. The water

assets will remain in public ownership, meaning they continue to be owned by the councils on behalf of the community.

As at 30 June 2025, Whanganui's three waters assets were valued at around \$651 million, making up 43% of the the council's total assets. Transferring services to the WS-CCO will affect some council support functions. Some services may be reduced over time as staff numbers change, while others will need to be absorbed elsewhere within the council. For the first 1–3 years, some support services will continue to be provided by Whanganui or Ruapehu councils through service agreements to help with the transition.

From March 2026, the Department of Internal Affairs will monitor progress on implementing the plan. The WS-CCO is expected to be legally established by mid-2026, with its own Board and Chief Executive. From 1 July 2027, it will take full responsibility for water services and for meeting new national water quality and economic standards.

Whakamānawa Protect

In this section

- Climate change projections
- Manawatu-Whanganui climate change action plan
- Coastal action plan
- Agricultural emissions
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Transport emissions
- Impacts of forestry
- Open spaces, parks and reserves

Climate Change P

Whanganui climate projections

Whanganui has been experiencing the effects of climate change for many years. Climate projections for the region indicate increasing impacts through to 2040, which is now only 14 years away and falls within the planning horizon of the 2027–2037 Long-term Plan.

These projections highlight that climate-related risks are no longer a distant future issue, but a current consideration that needs to be addressed through present-day planning and decision-making.

Temperature

Projections to 2040



- Annual average air temp to increase 0.7–0.9°C.



- Increase 5–15 more hot days over 25° per year.



- Eight more dry days a year.

Weather

Projections to 2040



- Extreme wind speeds increase by up to 10%.



- Less rainfall in winter and spring, and small increases in summer.



- Decrease of 10 – 25 frost days

Emergency

Projections to 2040



- Annual flood occurrence remains the same



- Increase in landslides and erosion with increasing rainfall intensity.



- Increase in days with very high and extreme fire danger

Manawatū-Whanganui Climate Change Action Plan

The Manawatū-Whanganui Climate Change Action Plan was commissioned by the Climate Action Joint Committee and offers some valuable insights. The Climate Change Action Plan sets out actions to help the district respond to climate change and reduce future risks.

The plan prioritises using natural solutions, such as wetlands, river planting, and coastal buffers, to reduce flooding, erosion, and stormwater impacts.

In practice, this means protecting and restoring natural systems that can absorb floodwaters, improve water quality, and support biodiversity.

Whats already being seen is warmer rivers, increased algal blooms, heavier rainfall, and pressure on freshwater ecosystems and recreation areas.

Councils can respond by managing water at a catchment scale, encouraging on-site stormwater management, and improving water storage on farms and in urban areas.

The plan highlights the need to limit development in areas that face increasing flood or erosion risk. This aligns with recent events that have disrupted communities, damaged infrastructure, and isolated neighbourhoods.

The action plan also emphasises building more compact towns and reducing reliance on short car trips.

This supports resilience during extreme weather events and helps communities stay connected when transport networks are disrupted.

Finally, the plan recognises the importance of protecting essential services and infrastructure, such as roads, water networks, and the port.

As climate impacts intensify, proactively addressing known issues like flooding, erosion, biodiversity loss, and freshwater health will help reduce future disruption and costs.

(Climate Actions Joint Committee, 2023)

Coastal Action Plan

Council is drafting a Coastal Action Plan for Whanganui's coastline. The plan will improve coastal features, protect and restore the native plants and species that remain along our coastline and provide longer term solutions to the unique challenges in Whanganui's coastal environment.

Initially the plan will address two key areas - Castlecliff and Mowhanau / Kai Iwi Beach. South Beach will also be investigated for future inclusion in the plan. The plan will address Castlecliff and Kai Iwi Beach separately, as the challenges faced at each site are starkly different. Castlecliff is an accreting coastline with windblown sand issues and poor

management of vehicle/ pedestrian use of dunes. Kai Iwi beach is a retreating coastline with naturally high erosion rates that are likely to be further exacerbated by climate change.

Engagement on the Castlecliff portion of the Coastal Action Plan is being led by Ngā Ringaringa Waewae. Ngā Ringaringa Waewae are a community and Hapū co-operative made up of Progress Castlecliff and Te Mata Pūau (a collective of Hapū who are also working on the port revitalisation project - Te Pūwaha). This engagement will incorporate the rejuvenation of the North Mole.

Emissions

Agricultural emissions

In 2024, agricultural emissions were 1812 tonnes CO₂-e per \$1 million of GDP, compared to the national sector average of 2041 tonnes. The greenhouse gas emissions contribution from agriculture is still the highest at 399.2 kilotonnes (kt) of CO₂-e, however, the sector delivered the largest reduction in total GHG emissions, decreasing by 149.4kt since its 2007 peak of 548.6kt.

The district's reliance on livestock and traditional agriculture results in the sector being more emissions intensive than the national average, which generates higher GHG emissions per unit of economic output. However, there is growing recognition that New Zealand's pastoral systems have a degree of circularity; pasture on livestock farms absorbs carbon dioxide during growth, partially offsetting emissions from livestock. If carbon sequestration through pasture were more fully acknowledged in emissions accounting, it might further reduce Whanganui's agricultural emissions intensity and better reflect the sustainability of local farming practices.

Forestry, which is included in agricultural emission numbers, is legislatively recognised as a carbon sink. The expansion of forestry in the Whanganui district, combined with reductions in livestock over nearly two decades, has contributed significantly to moving the sector's emissions level below the national average.

Governmental shifts in climate change policy are beginning to recognise the scientific basis for emissions reductions and the practical realities of farming and food production, helping to reassure agricultural producers that their efforts towards sustainability and emissions efficiency are valued and supported.

Outside of the agricultural emissions, the sector's GDP contribution to manufacturing over the last two decades has moved from \$157.6m in 2007 (out of a total manufacturing GDP value of \$234m) to \$174.8m in 2025 (out of a total manufacturing GDP value of \$261.2m).

Greenhouse gas emissions

Trends are best measured over time and having close to 20 years of data assists to paint a picture in how the district is tracking toward its sustainability goals.

Whanganui district has achieved a significant milestone in reducing its greenhouse gas (GHG) emission intensity to its lowest recorded level of 201 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e) per \$1 million of GDP. It marks a substantial improvement from the district's recorded peak of 311 tonnes in 2007 and demonstrates a clear trend of enhanced emissions efficiency. Its 201 tonnes remain

higher than the national average of 160 tonnes in 2024, recognising the district's reliance on the primary sector for its economic prosperity.

From a per capita basis, which enables different population sizes to be fairly compared to one another, the district's GHG emissions were 12 tonnes CO₂-e, a reduction from the district's high of 17 tonnes CO₂-e, and lower than the national average 15 tonnes CO₂-e.

Transport emissions (electric vehicles)

Transport emissions in Whanganui and the wider Manawatū-Whanganui region have increased over recent years. In 2023, the region's transport-related industries produced 135.9 kilotonnes of CO₂. This is roughly 65,000 average NZ households' electricity use for a year. These numbers reflect steady growth as road travel and freight activity picked up again after COVID-19.

Within the Whanganui district, transport, postal, and warehousing activities generated an estimated 51.3 kilotonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2023, nearly double the amount recorded in 2018, reflecting both increased activity and continued reliance on fossil-fuel transport. Nationally, transport emissions rose by around 3% between 2022 and 2023, largely due to higher travel demand. This increase was partially offset by improvements in vehicle fuel efficiency and earlier uptake of electric vehicles.

However, recent local trends suggest a slowdown in the transition to electric vehicles.

The number of EV registrations in Whanganui district fell by 63.6% in the year to September 2025 compared with the previous year.

This decline was substantially larger than the national decrease of 40.9%. Annual EV registrations in the district dropped to just 12 vehicles in the year to September 2025, down from 33 the previous year and 91 in the year to September 2023. This sharp reduction indicates a significant softening in local EV uptake at a time when transport emissions remain elevated.

Several factors are likely contributing to this decline. The removal of national purchase incentives, including the Clean Car Discount, has increased the upfront cost of EVs, which can be a stronger barrier in lower-income districts such as Whanganui. Higher interest rates and broader cost-of-living pressures may also be discouraging households from making large vehicle purchases, particularly where EVs are perceived as less affordable than used petrol vehicles.

Fuel crisis - April 2026

Recent fuel price rises are starting to change how people in Whanganui get around. Local vehicle dealerships and bike stores have reported a strong and rapid increase in interest in hybrid and electric vehicles. However, local stock is limited, so sales figures don't fully reflect the level of interest. Several dealers said this is because electric vehicles had not been a major focus in recent years, meaning supply is now tight and new stock is often directed to larger centres first.

Bike stores have also seen a lift in demand, with more electric bikes being sold and an increase in repairs and servicing of older bikes that had been sitting unused.

While anecdotal, these observations suggest rising fuel costs are prompting more people re-consider at lower-cost transport options.

Impacts of forestry

Forestry has become one of the strongest drivers of growth in Whanganui's primary sector since 2007. Forestry and logging GDP more than doubled from \$41.9 million to \$89.3 million, growing at 4.6% annually and now contributing 3.48% to the districts economy. Employment in forestry and logging also increased from 97 to 176 jobs, indicating that the sector has delivered both economic output and new employment.

The increase in forestry has coincided with a decline in GDP for the sheep, beef and grain farming sector, falling from \$64.3 million to \$47.4 million and employment dropping from 559 to 379 jobs. This suggests that some of the forestry expansion has occurred alongside a contraction in pastoral farming.

Overall, forestry has had a positive impact on Whanganui's GDP, strengthening the district's primary sector performance. However, the larger loss of jobs in sheep and beef farming indicates that while forestry increases economic value, it may not fully replace the broader employment and community impacts previously generated by pastoral agriculture. It is important, when using GDP, to analyse trends. While forestry and logging in Whanganui have more than doubled in GDP return, the manufacturing of furniture, wood product and paper has decreased from \$26.5m in 2007 to \$18.8m in 2025.



Open Spaces, Parks and Reserves

Whanganui District Council currently owns and/or administers 150 reserves (open spaces) in the district. The increased role for local government in supporting community wellbeing, as well as the council's relatively recent strategies for housing, climate change, open spaces and heritage, all influence what the key priorities might be for parks, open spaces, and the sporting and recreational activities they support.

There are opportunities to develop suitable parks, reserves and open spaces in the district in ways which would assist the council in delivering on its different legislative and strategic objectives.

Additionally, the introduction of the Te Awa Tupua legislation in 2017 now acknowledges the Whanganui River as an indivisible whole and protects the environmental, social, cultural and economic health and wellbeing of the river.

The open space network, and sport and recreational activities, in the district should uphold the objectives of Te Awa Tupua and support decision-making that protects the health and wellbeing of the Whanganui River.

There are also opportunities to better support the community's connection with the Awa.



Open Spaces and Physical Activity Strategy

The Open Spaces and Physical Activity Strategy was introduced in 2022. This strategy sets long-term goals for public open spaces, sport, recreation and play in the district.

Whanganui District Council joined the He ra ki tua Horizons Region Sport and Recreation Spaces and Place Plan in 2023. This Plan has been developed to provide direction and determine priority areas of focus for the spaces and places that enable play, active recreation and sport.

You can view the **Open Spaces and Physical Activity Strategy** [on our website](#).

Whakakorikori Activate

In this section

- Emergency preparedness
- Town centre regeneration
- Earthquake prone buildings
- Inner city living
- Public safety
- Tourism



Emergency preparedness

Whanganui has a long history of significant flooding, particularly around the Whanganui, Whangaehu and Mangawhero Rivers.

With climate change expected to bring more frequent and intense storms, along with heavier rainfall, our district faces increasing flood risks, both from our major rivers and from smaller catchments that can quickly become overwhelmed.

But emergencies can take many forms; earthquakes, tsunamis, landslides, volcanic activity, hazardous spills, and even pandemics can strike with little warning. Because of this, building a well-prepared and resilient community is just as important as being able to respond and recover when events occur.

In the coming years, our emergency management team will continue to focus on strengthening readiness, supporting community resilience, and ensuring Whanganui is equipped to face whatever comes our way.

In the 2024 Community Views Survey, just under half of respondents (214 people) reported having an emergency kit at home. Older residents were more likely than younger respondents to have one prepared. Despite this, most households indicated they would be able to cope for at least one week in an emergency, suggesting a level of practical resilience even where formal preparedness is still developing.

Town centre

Town centre regeneration

For the past eight years, regeneration of the Whanganui town centre has been guided by the Making Whanganui Visible Regeneration Strategy, which sets out a long-term vision and implementation pathway for revitalising the heart of the city. Using a comprehensive place-making approach, the project has focused on strengthening Whanganui's identity, enhancing its vibrancy, improving the built environment, and guiding future development.

To support this work, a Town Centre Steering Committee was established during earlier The council trienniums and a preliminary action plan was put in place, which the council has been actively implementing through initiatives such as public artworks, pop-ups, etc.

In recent years, there has been an opportunity to review the existing document and align proposed actions with Mainstreet Whanganui project objectives, and the new UNESCO City of Design designation. A comprehensive survey of CBD buildings has now been completed by the council's policy planning team, providing a valuable foundation for understanding the town

centre's current status and future development potential, in the context of spatial planning work required under Resource Management Act reform.

In the upcoming period, the Town Regeneration Steering Group (now led by Mainstreet, with Council support) will guide the next phase of planning - refining high level strategic direction and identifying the CBD's needs and priorities.

The steering group will review key documents, assess CBD needs with stakeholders, create criteria for evaluating projects, prioritise short and long-term initiatives, and produce a final five-year regeneration plan outlining selected projects and required resources.

Earthquake-prone buildings

Every local territorial authority, including Whanganui District, is obligated to act in accordance with the Building (Earthquake-prone Buildings) Amendment Act 2016 (the Act).

The Act directs councils across the country to ensure that in areas where there is significant risk of seismic damage, and loss of life due to collapse of larger and/or older buildings in a future earthquake, they ensure affected property owners mitigate the possible risk within a certain timeframe (timeframes vary but are partly based on when an Earthquake-Prone Building notice is issued by a council for a building).

Changes to the system have recently been proposed after a review process, in part to reduce unnecessary costs and disruption to regional communities.

Inner-city living

Central Whanganui's historic building stock offers strong potential for adaptive re-use, particularly through the activation of upper floors for a mix of commercial, social, and residential activities. Revitalising these heritage neighborhoods would support a more vibrant town centre and align with broader shifts in how people choose to live and move within urban environments. Strengthening safety and accessibility - both within buildings and in the surrounding public realm - will be essential to support this transition.

According to the 2023 Census (Stats NZ), Whanganui Central has a resident population of 720 people, representing a relatively small share of the wider district. Around 42% of residents are homeowners or hold their property in a family trust, and the area contains approximately 390 private dwellings. This statistical area covers the wider central zone, not just the CBD.

Based on the Town Centre stocktake data, which focused solely on the CBD blocks, there is approximately 11,500 m² of total residential floor area within the CBD. Of this, around

A bill was consequently introduced to Parliament and this passed its first reading in December 2025.

Under the proposed new law, because Whanganui has a population of over 10,000 people, many of the buildings that are currently are considered earthquake-prone will still need to have strengthening work undertaken, though in many cases the work required will be contained to facades only (instead of the entire building).

Until the new law comes into force (expected during 2026), councils are required to implement the existing provisions of the Act.

2,600 m², or 23%, is currently vacant. Most existing apartments are directly associated with businesses operating on the ground floor, reflecting the mixed-use character of the central city.

Converting older buildings into modern apartments would need priority to increase inner-city living options, supported by required Building Code upgrades and seismic strengthening that enables new residential use and upper-floor activation.

Progress on improving alternative urban transport choices, enhancing public transport use, and encouraging active travel will further support inner city living by improving accessibility for all. Addressing missing amenities, such as grocery options, well designed green spaces, waste services, parking, and responses to social and safety issues, will also be critical to creating a functional, attractive, and liveable inner city environment.

Public safety

In the year to September 2025, Whanganui District recorded 2361 offences. This was 691 fewer offences than in the previous 12-month period, showing an overall decrease in recorded crime.

The crime rate for the district was 350 offences per 10,000 residents, down from 376 the year before. Put simply, this means there were about 35 recorded offences for every 1,000 people over the year, or roughly 3 to 4 offences for every 100 residents. These figures refer to the number of offences recorded, not the number of people involved.

A single person or location can be linked to more than one offence, and not every offence has a direct individual victim.

Across the year, this level of offending equates to an average of around six to seven recorded offences per day across the district. While the overall trend shows a reduction locally, Whanganui's crime rate remains higher than both the national rate of 215 offences per 10,000 residents and the Manawātū-Whanganui regional rate of 271.

This indicates that, despite recent declines, levels of recorded offending in Whanganui remain elevated compared with other areas, and continue to be a relevant factor when considering community wellbeing and the use of public spaces.

What contributed the most?

Theft is the largest contributor to recorded crime in Whanganui. In this context, theft is broader than simply stealing an item from a shop or person. It includes taking property without permission, as well as using or dealing with someone else's property in a way that permanently deprives the owner of it.

Burglary is a related but distinct offence. It occurs when someone enters a building or enclosed space with the intention of committing a crime, most often theft. Burglary does not require forced entry and can include theft from places such as sheds or enclosed yards.

This distinction helps explain why theft appears more frequently in recorded crime data.

The importance of tourism to Whanganui's economy

Tourism is a vital and expanding contributor to Whanganui's economy, generating \$64.7 million in GDP per year. This represents 2.5% of the district's total economic activity and underpins a broad network of local businesses. The industry benefits from the district's natural and cultural assets, including New Zealand's longest navigable river and a historic, compact, and easily walkable urban centre. Whanganui offers visitors a compelling combination of heritage, arts and culture, and outdoor adventures.

The tourism sector employed 1343 people in Whanganui district in 2024. This amounted to 6.2% of Whanganui District's total employment as compared to 5.4% in 2000.

A strong visitor economy makes Whanganui a more attractive place to live, invest, and raise a family. Visitors leave with great stories, and locals benefit from a more dynamic, connected, and thriving community.

Tourism growth

The tourism sector in Whanganui has demonstrated strong resilience following the disruptions caused by COVID-19. By 2025, visitors spent a total of \$191.8 million across the district, marking a 4.8% increase from the

previous year, a period when national tourism spending remained flat. Domestic visitors accounted for the majority of this activity, representing 81.5% of total expenditure, while international visitors contributed 18.4%.

Challenges in promotional investment

Whanganui's tourism growth was supported by significant central government investment. However, by 2025, the allocated budget for this activity will have declined to only one-third of its 2021/22 value. This reduction, in conjunction with the integration of the new

Visitors Experiences group within Whanganui District Council and the presence of ageing assets, has led to an investment shortfall. This significant restructure and reduction poses a threat to the district's ability to remain competitive.

Strategic visitor growth and sustainable management

Whanganui, like many regional districts, remains committed to increasing its visitor numbers. However, it is crucial that this growth is managed thoughtfully and responsibly to secure ongoing community support for tourism and to protect the local environment, particularly in alignment with obligations under Te Awa Tupua. Leveraging all of Whanganui's distinctive assets, including its UNESCO City of Design designation, should be a priority. This approach requires engaging local stakeholders through some much needed development of the current Destination Management Plan. Destination management is a collaborative approach that brings together stakeholders across a destination's ecosystem

to determine how tourism is planned, developed, and managed. It considers the social, cultural, environmental, and economic opportunities and challenges, and supports communities to shape tourism in ways that reflect their values, aspirations, and priorities. This approach enables destinations to respond to changing conditions, manage impacts, and plan for long-term success.

This plan has not been revisited since 2020 and no longer fully reflects our current tourism landscape. This will require investment and inclusion in the long-term plan.

Events, accomodation capacity and development needs

Events drive travel for local and international visitors. Whanganui has a good selection of events throughout the year which deliver ongoing meaningful impact for the city. Many of these events, and the attraction of larger events, are limited by Whanganui's current accommodation offering.

Whanganui currently offers around 25 commercial accommodation options, providing approximately 730 stay units. Despite this,

the city's three hotels collectively have only 98 rooms, and there has been no new hotel development since 1968. This has resulted in a constrained accommodation supply. The lack of suitable accommodation for medium- and large-scale events and conferences means the region misses out on these lucrative visitor activities and their subsequent economic benefits. The council has initiated discussions to address this shortfall.

The wider economic impact of tourism

Tourism plays a significant role in supporting a diverse value chain in Whanganui, benefiting accommodation providers, hospitality businesses, transport services, retailers, cultural enterprises, and experience operators.

Effective tourism promotion enhances a destination's image and reputation nationally and globally. A positive perception of a place

not only attracts more visitors, but also leads to attracting more residents, enhancing business opportunities and more investment, therefore contributing to the long-term growth and prosperity for local residents.

Whanganui is well-positioned for growth in the tourism sector, but securing the necessary resources will be key to realising this potential.



Whakanuia Celebrate

In this section

- Arts, culture and events in Whanganui
- Arts and culture strategic plan 2019-2029
- Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery
- Heritage
- UNESCO City of Design



Arts, culture and events in Whanganui

Whanganui has a strong heritage of arts and culture which established its internationally recognised designation as a UNESCO City of Design in 2021.

Standing as one of 49 other cities of design worldwide, Whanganui recognises the need to preserve our invaluable arts and culture

heritage, sustain current creative outputs, and foster new initiatives to attract new creative business and contribute to a sense of wellbeing and belonging for residents. Infometrics data confirms that the arts has continued to be a growth sector for Whanganui.

The arts and culture calendar boasts a wide variety of events including:

Whanganui Opera Week

Presenting a range of events with talented students from the New Zealand Opera School based in Whanganui.

Fest of Cultural Unity

A vibrant celebration of Whanganui's diverse ethnic communities with music, dance, and food.

Artist Open Studios

One of New Zealand's oldest and intimate art trails which connects audiences with a multitude of local artists in their studio spaces.

Lit. Whanganui Booklovers Festival

A biennial programme of events presenting New Zealand authors from across the country, to entertain, educate and charm Whanganui's book loving community.

Festival of Design Aotearoa

A new national event celebrating the role of design in shaping life in New Zealand will launch on 16 October this year. The 10-day festival will be anchored in Whanganui and extend across the wider Whanganui-Manawātū region bringing together designers, technologists, businesses and communities.

Other key events include

- La Fiesta: New Zealand's Women's Festival
- Whanganui Heritage Month
- Vintage Weekend

Whanganui is also home to a number of cultural facilities including

- Whanganui Regional Museum
- Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery
- New Zealand Glassworks
- Amdram – New Zealand's oldest active musical theatre group.

Arts and culture strategic plan 2019-2029

Whanganui District Council's Arts and Culture Strategic Plan continues to guide five key goals of promoting mana whenua participation, championing arts, our creative sector, supporting funding and connection within the creative sector, supporting growth of a creative economy and enabling access and engagement to arts and culture for all.

Key avenues for community arts funding include:

- The Public Art Fund - which supports local artists to deliver innovative, site-specific and engaging public art for communities
- Creative Communities Scheme – funded by Creative New Zealand and administered by Whanganui District Council for local communities to access and engage with arts and culture.

Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery

365 artists



12 awards

\$32.6 million
brought into
the district



131,613
visitors



\$119,865 total
donations
received

276 collection
artworks
exhibited



262 talks,
events and
classes



Te Whare o Rehua Sarjeant Gallery (the gallery) has exceeded all expectations for visitation and regional impact. In its first year since opening in November 2024, the gallery welcomed 131,613 visitors, more than double the predicted figure of 65,000. Of these, 78,573 were visitors from outside the district, demonstrating the gallery's strong role in attracting people to Whanganui.

Visitor data shows a balanced mix of local, national and international visitors. See the figure above for details. Donations totalled \$119,865, including \$19,506 in door donations, and the gallery is estimated to have generated \$32.6 million in economic activity for the region.

Public programmes and education are also still popular. A total of 262 talks, events and educational visits attracted over 11,000 visitors, reinforcing the gallery's role as a cultural and learning hub for the district.

The gallery's collections and exhibitions programme also continues to grow. During the year, 49 artworks were added through gifts, bequests, and acquisitions. A total of 276 collection works were exhibited across 15 new exhibitions and featuring 365 artists. The artist-in-residence programme has also continued, with three artists hosted at Tylee Cottage.

The \$79.4 million redevelopment, incorporating a new building with expanded gallery, education, and collection storage spaces, has already received 12 awards, including the New Zealand Institute of Architects Heritage Architecture award, and a Purple Pin in the Designers Institute of NZ Best Awards – marking it the 'best of the best' in design for 2025.

Heritage

Ngā Taonga Tuku Iho Whanganui District Heritage Strategy

Whanganui has a high reputation for its quality and quantity of heritage places.

The council manages many publicly accessible places with national heritage significance. It also has legal obligations under the District Plan and the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 to ensure all heritage places are sustainably managed.

The council has committed to ongoing heritage outcomes via the Whanganui Heritage Strategy 2021-2031, of which the stage 2 action plan is currently being drafted.

Broadly, the work programme contained within the strategy can be summarised under the following components:

- Advocacy and promotion: community education about heritage management, communicating the true value and economic role of heritage in Whanganui, and influencing national policy objectives
- Protection and regulatory functions: clarifying processes, dispelling myths and ensuring the most important heritage features of a place are sustained.
- Incentives: operating the Whanganui Heritage Grant Fund successfully, and offering rates remissions under certain circumstances.

UNESCO City of Design

Whanganui was internationally recognised as a UNESCO City of Design in 2021, joining the global Creative Cities Network and affirming its historic and contemporary contributions to design. Since then, Whanganui District Council, in partnership with community and business initiatives, has driven tangible projects that celebrate design excellence.

Local businesses are encouraged to adopt the Whanganui City of Design tohu - a mark of quality that elevates products and services designed in Whanganui. International

partnerships are developing, including a 2026 textile design exchange with Dundee City of Design, supported by the British Council and Scottish Government. In October 2026, Whanganui will launch the inaugural New Zealand Festival of Design, establishing an anchor event for the City of Design designation.



Topics of interest

Static at February 2026

Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill

A proposed law change that refocuses councils on the basics (like roads, water, rubbish and public facilities), tightens transparency and performance reporting, and aims to keep pressure off rates. It amends the Local Government Act 2002 and has been through select committee.

The amendment would remove the “four wellbeings” and focus on the cost effective local infrastructure that are listed below.
Core services: A list of services councils must prioritise (e.g., network infrastructure, public transport, waste, civil defence, libraries/museums/reserves).

Accountability and transparency: Stronger performance measures and public reporting, including disclosure of spending on consultants and contractors.

System changes linked to rates: This Bill sits within a wider reform programme that also looks at capping rates via the Local Government (System Improvements) Amendment Bill.

It was introduced in July 2025, had its first reading, went to the Governance & Administration Select Committee (which reported back in November 2025), and is now at later stages in Parliament. You can read the Bill and track its progress online. [bills.parliament.nz]

If passed, councils would be legally steered toward core, cost effective services and more consistent public reporting. This could influence what the council prioritises, how budgets are set, and how to explain performance is explained to the community.

Simplifying Local Government structure

This is a Government proposal that aims to change how local government is organised, particularly at the regional level.

At present, many areas have both a regional council and several city or district councils, which the Government says can be confusing and duplicative.

Under the proposal, elected regional councillors would be replaced by a new governing body made up of the mayors of the city and district councils in that region.

This group would take on the governance role currently held by regional councils. Regional

council staff and day-to-day operations would continue as they do now, but decisions would be made through this new structure.

The mayor-led boards would temporarily take on regional decision-making and would then be required to develop a regional reorganisation plan showing how councils could work together more efficiently in the future.

The proposal was out for consultation as of February 2026, and no final decisions have been made to date.

Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport

A decision to establish the Ministry of Cities, Environment, Regions and Transport (MCERT) was made on 16 December 2025. A chief executive is to be appointed in the first half of 2026, with the ministry intended to be fully operational by July 2026.

MCERT brings together the Ministry for the Environment, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, the Ministry of Transport, and the local government functions currently within the Department of Internal Affairs.

Ministers say current responsibilities are fragmented across multiple agencies, making it hard to coordinate reforms on housing affordability, infrastructure delivery and climate adaptation. MCERT is pitched as a “one stop shop” for councils and partners, and it’s intended to give more integrated advice and clearer accountability across these portfolios.

National Adaptation Framework (climate change)

The National Adaptation Framework, released in October 2025, sets out the Government’s long-term approach to managing the increasing risks New Zealand faces from climate change. Rather than focusing on emissions reduction, the framework is about adaption built around four pillars.

- better risk information
- clearer roles and responsibilities between central and local government
- investment in risk reduction, and
- fair cost sharing before and after events

For councils, two practical shifts matter:

- national data/standards to drive more consistent decisions
- forthcoming legislative changes to require local adaptation plans in priority areas, linked to the reformed planning system.

City and Regional Deals

City and Regional Deals are 10-year agreements between central and local governments. These are intended to align a small number of high impact priorities. It aims to unlock growth, enable housing, improve transport/connectivity, and lift infrastructure delivery.

Regions submitted “light touch” proposals in early 2025. The government assessed these and negotiated bespoke deals. The first Memorandum of Understandings were signed with Auckland, Otago/Central Lakes, and Western Bay of Plenty.

City and Regional Deals are not primarily about

new funding. Instead, they focus on better coordination, earlier alignment with national reforms, improved access to existing funding and financing tools, and clearer expectations on delivery.

In April 2026, the first City and Regional Deal was signed between Auckland City Council and Central Government.

There is no announced City and Regional Deal for Whanganui as of February 2026.

Resource Management system overhaul

The government has announced changes to the Resource Management Act (RMA) with the introduction of the Planning Bill and Natural Environment Bill into parliament.

The new system includes:

- A narrower set of effects that are regulated, so more activities can happen without needing approval.
- more standardisation with new national standards across the country for environmental limits and land use.
- one combined plan for each region that implements national direction and includes spatial, natural environment and land-use.
- binding environmental limits set by central and local government for human

health and ecological limits for air, water, land and soils, and indigenous biodiversity.

The development of the new regional spatial plan and combined land-use plans will need to be resourced while maintaining the existing transitional systems. As proposed, the spatial plan will set the direction for growth and have implications for infrastructure provision.

The wider local government reform, including changes being consulted on with the regional Council, will amplify the RMA and LG sector reforms.

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