



Adelaide Hills Council

Gumeracha Opportunity Shop Service Review

August 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Overview and History

The Gumeracha Opportunity Shop (Op Shop) is owned and operated by the Adelaide Hills Council (AHC). The Op Shop commenced trading prior to the formation of AHC in 1997, and was first established to meet a local need in the community at a time when this type of alternative shopping offering was limited. The Op Shop operates from a small detached building adjacent to the AHC owned Torrens Valley Community Centre (Community Centre). We understand that the Country Women's Association (CWA) was initially involved in raising funds to support the original construction of the now Op Shop building.

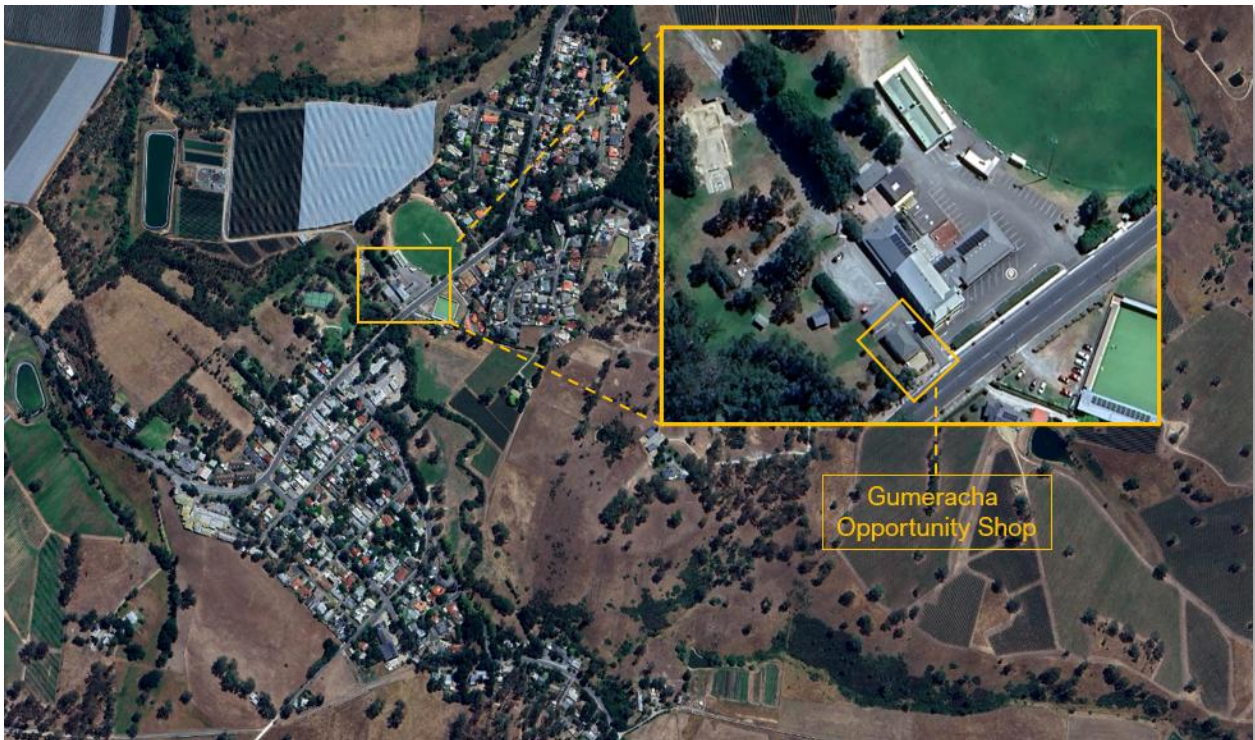
The parking facilities for the Op Shop are shared with the Community Centre which also neighbours the Gumeracha Oval at 45 Albert Street Gumeracha. An external photo and position of the Op Shop are shown Figures One and Two.

AHC's Community Centres Team, within the Community and Development Department is responsible for the management of the Op Shop supported by a volunteer workforce. This team collectively allocates time to the Op Shop as required as part of its broader duties and there are no individual council employees who serve customers of the Op Shop or who directly manage the service. There are no leasing or other contractual arrangements in place in relation to the Op Shop.

Figure One: Gumeracha Op Shop



Figure Two: Position of Gumeracha Op Shop



Scope of Work

In the AHC 2024 Strategic Plan, Council includes a commitment to “Undertake a high-level review which considers effectiveness, efficiency and opportunities of all council services (O5.1)”¹. Some recent issues have prompted the AHC Administration to prioritise a review of the Op Shop.

This Service Review has considered the rationale and long-term viability of the Op Shop by examining matters that include:

- trends in community demand, competition, and demographic shifts
- alignment of the service with AHC’s strategic priorities
- financial performance
- WHS issues and building condition
- current and future resource requirements
- challenges and opportunities.

Methodology

BRM Advisory attended the Community Centre and Op Shop on Tuesday, 24 June. AHC staff including the Director Community and Development, Manager Community Capacity, Community Centre Operations Officer and Community Development Officer provided a tour of the Op Shop which was followed by an interview to gather information for the review.

The site inspection and interview were complemented by a detailed review of the following documents:

¹ Your Place Your Space Strategic Plan 2024 Adelaide Hills Council pg 25

- Volunteer roster
- Financial reports
- Audit reports
- AHC Strategic Plan 2024
- AHC Annual Report 2023-24
- AHC Annual Business Plan 2024-25
- Gumeracha Opportunity Shop Volunteer Role Description

Consultation with Op Shop volunteers was not within the scope of the work undertaken for this Service Review.

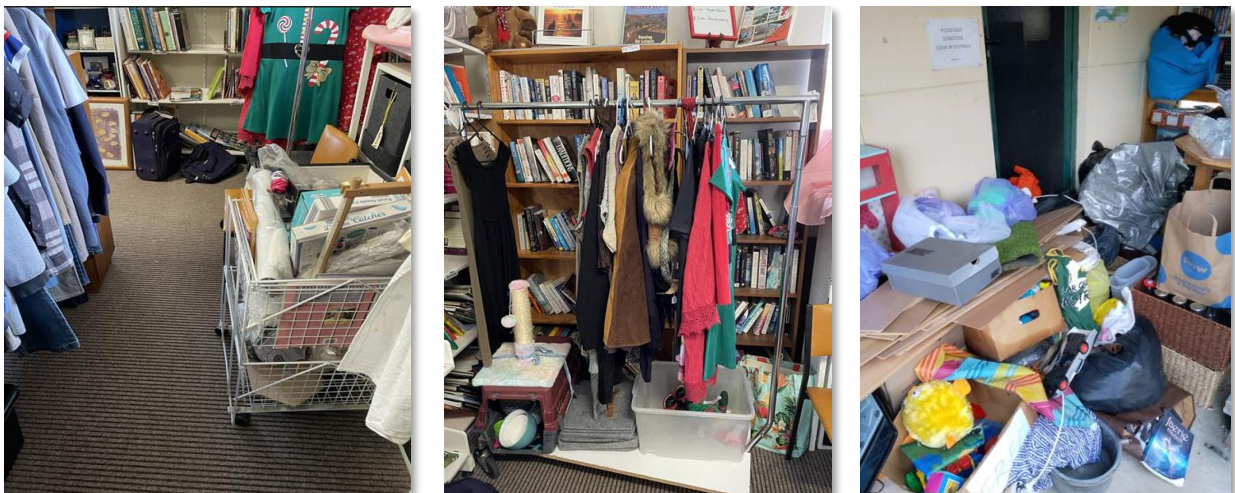
WHS Audit

To fulfil Work Health and Safety (WHS) requirements, regular audits of the Op Shop are undertaken by AHC. A recent WHS audit confirmed long standing issues relating to the building and the broader site, including:

- insufficient access into and within the shop with concern raised about stock blocking walkways and goods overflowing into the outside veranda area.
- overstocking was identified as the predominant issue presenting a hazard to volunteers and staff, creating tripping hazards and the risk of crush injury, manual handling and emergency planning risks.
- concerns about whether the emergency alarm could be heard in the shop when activated in the Community Centre.
- no hot water or drinking water available in the building.
- the need to clear donations promptly to reinforce that the site is monitored and thereby discourage illegal dumping.

A deep clean and consolidation of stock was undertaken in May 2025 to make the space accessible and safe for volunteers, staff and customers. Excess items were donated to the Red Nose Foundation or managed through responsible recycling practices. **Figure Three** shows photos taken prior to this process.

Figure Three: Photos prior to deep clean



Council has worked with volunteers to support them through this process and to maintain conditions that will minimise WHS issues from recurring.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

In accordance with the *Local Government Act, 1999*, AHC has in place clear documentation that details its goals, objectives and priorities. The Strategic Plan Goals below, as set out in the AHC Annual Business Plan 2024-25 provide the basis for setting objectives and priorities under each of these streams.

Our goals



1

Natural Environment

NE 1 Pursue our adopted pathway to achieve net zero carbon emissions.

NE 2 Support the community and businesses to decarbonise and transition to sustainable lifestyle practices (green communities).

NE 3 Protect, improve, expand and connect habitat.

NE 4 Build resilience in the natural environment to adapt to climate and other environmental changes.

NE 5 Improve landscape character and amenity value on Council managed land.

See more about this goal on page 13.



2

Community Wellbeing

CW 1 Promote and support reconciliation.

CW2 Enrich, empower and support connected communities.

CW 3 Embrace diversity in our community and build on community strengths.

CW 4 Build community resilience for the future.

CW 5 Foster cultural identity and connection to place.

CW 6 Promote physical, mental and social wellbeing.

See more about this goal on page 16.



3

Built Form and Economy

BFE 1 Guide development that fosters vibrant and resilient communities, promotes appropriate design and enhances livability.

BFE 2 Nurture a distinctive sense of place, support activation activities and recognise and celebrate our rich heritage.

BFE 3 Develop and maintain infrastructure to support livability and sustainable economic activity.

BFE 4 Improve the utilisation of Council and community facilities.

BFE 5 Promote sustainable prosperity by supporting tourism, creative industries, primary production and vibrant townships.

See more about this goal on page 20.



4

Organisation

O1 Embrace technology solutions and digital transformation to enhance our organisation and the community experience.

O2 Operate with integrity using best practice governance processes.

O3 Support and develop a skilled organisation that is aligned to Council's priorities.

O4 Engage and advocate for our communities.

O5 Evolve Council's functions and services to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of our community.

See more about this goal on page 23.

AHC's strategic documents also state that the Council's focus is on:

'Supporting and strengthening our community, environment and region by developing a responsible budget which recognises our unique constraints and is geared towards delivering essential services, prudent resource management, and sustainability'.

The AHC Annual Business Plan 2024-25 highlights the initiatives that will be delivered throughout the year. In the Community Wellbeing stream this includes implementing further action in the Towards Community Led Resilience Program and Activating the Fabrik Arts and Heritage Hub.

The AHC Annual Business Plan 2024-25 also provides details on the services and day to day activities of the Council. The services of importance to this Service Review are Community Centres under the Community and Development Department which are described as follows:

Community Centres: *Providing opportunities to improve health and wellbeing, participate in lifelong learning and sharing skills with others.*

Community Development: *Overseeing community wellbeing and disability access and inclusion programs, as well as a number of regional support programs, including provision of funding to The Hut Community Centre and the Adelaide Hills Community Passenger Transport Network.*

No reference to the Op Shop was found in the Council's strategic documents and this activity is not directly contributing towards delivery of the Community Centre or Community Development services as described above.

The following AHC Annual Business Plan 2024-25, Objectives and Corporate Performance Indicators are relevant to the Op Shop. These are:

- Objective C3.2 - Support volunteering with a target of 3500 hrs per annum set as a Corporate Performance Indicator.
- Objective N5 - Assist the community reduce the impact of waste to landfill on the environment to prevent valuable resources going to landfill and reduce contamination in kerbside recycling bins.

While operating the Op Shop can contribute to these objectives, consideration is needed as to whether this is the most efficient and sustainable way for AHC to achieve these objectives.

After reviewing Council's strategic documents, it is evident that operating an Opportunity Shop is not core business for AHC and does not align with its key focus, priorities or description of its service delivery, including Council's strategic intent to focus on delivering essential services.

MARKET SCAN

Council operated Op Shops

We undertook research to determine whether there are other Councils in South Australia that own and operate Opportunity Shops.

There is limited information available. Of the information found shops were either clearly run by charity, Church, not for profit or other identifiable group such as the CFS or designated as run by a local community group usually in regional areas. It is evident that very few, if any, metropolitan Councils own and operate an Opportunity Shop as is the case in Gumeracha.

Distribution of Other Op Shops

Table One lists the location of other Opportunity Shops in the surrounding area. These shops are operated by charity, not for profit, church and community groups as well as organisations such as the Country Fire Service (CFS) and Carers and disAbility Link. There is also another Op Shop located in Gumeracha that is operated by the Uniting Church.

Table One: Other Opportunity Shop Operators

Location	Operator	Distance from Op Shop (km)
Gumeracha	Uniting Church	0.6
Birdwood Cross Shop	Uniting Church	7.9
Kersbrook	Local community – supports the Kersbrook Soldiers Memorial Park	9.2
Lobethal CFS	CFS	10
Woodside Op Shop	Carers and disAbility Link	17
Ridgehaven	RSPCA	20
St Agnes	ReGEN – cooperative of non-profit charity and community groups	21
St Agnes	Save the Children	23
Balhannah	Anglican Church	23
Williamstown	Wirraminna Little Shop of Treasure	23
Para Hills	Salvation Army	27
Hahndorf	Christian Care and Share	30
Bridgewater	CFS	32
Aldgate	Salvation Army	33
Stirling	Founded to support RDNS – now local community group	33

From the available information owning and operating an opportunity shop is not usual practice for South Australian Councils as this service is usually provided by the Not-For-Profit sector as a fund-raising activity. There are 10 other opportunity shops within a 25km radius of Gumeracha.

CURRENT STATE

Service Delivery

Day to Day Operation and Volunteers

The Op Shop is currently open to the public over the following times:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday	10am – 3pm
Friday, Saturday and Sunday	Closed

13 Council volunteers currently support the operation of the Op Shop serving customers, sorting donations, pricing goods and maintaining displays. Volunteers are signatories to the Op Shop Retail Assistant Role Description which states:

- The position is on a roster basis, usually 5 hours per week or fortnight.
- Duties include sorting, cleaning and selling donations from the community for resale as well as store display and staging items for sale.
- Daily operations of the retail store include:
 - service to all customers both face to face and phone enquiries
 - processing sales, handling cash and recording all transactions manually in the receipt book and total of end of day sales on daily statistic sheets
 - promoting a proactive approach to WHS policies and procedures
 - pricing and merchandising new stock
 - maintaining shop displays, pop up sales and housekeeping standard

Volunteers live across the Adelaide Hills and beyond. They are asked to sign in and out at the Community Centre reception at the start and end of each shift for site emergency planning purposes. While full names and addresses have not been provided for this Review, volunteers' localities and years of service have been shared. These are summarised in Table Two. There are two volunteers with Services Australia Mutual Obligations. These activities are undertaken to fulfill the requirements of the Commonwealth Government when receiving payments such as JobSeeker allowance.

Table Two: Volunteer Profile

Volunteer residence	Distance (km) approximate	Council Area	Years of service
Tungkillo (2)	19	Mid Murray	8 & 11
Birdwood (3)	8	AHC	2, 7 & 7
Kenton Valley	4	AHC	10
Houghton (2)	15	AHC	9 & <1
Forreston (2)	3	AHC	1 & 8
Kongolia (Cambrai)	59	Mid Murray	3
Gumeracha	from within township	AHC	15

A minimum of two volunteers are required each day to operate the shop. There are different volunteers each day working one day a week. The same volunteers usually work on their designated days effectively operating as their own team which is different each day. There are usually four in Monday's team, three in Tuesday's and Wednesday's teams and two in Thursday's Team. If

volunteers are unavailable for their rostered shift or are unwell on the day, they notify the Community Centre staff. Staff then seek to fill the vacancy with other volunteers or make the decision to not open that day. If this occurs staff post a notification on local social media and erect a sign at the Shop entrance.

Stock Management

The building has a semi-enclosed veranda near the front door which provides an area for donations to be left when the store is closed. It was noted at the site inspection that despite a prominent sign stating electrical items could not be accepted, an electrical item had been left as a donation and this would need to be managed by Council staff.

Donations that cannot be sold in the shop are stored in the Community Centre. At the time of the site visit there was multiple bags containing goods being stored in the Community Centre awaiting disposal or on-donation. The goods in these bags had been sorted from new donations received in the 4-week period following the clean and consolidation process. This highlighted the need for constant monitoring and management of stock to prevent overcrowding. There was also concern raised that storage in the Community Centre could create a WHS issue itself and prevent the space being available for other activities.

Council was informed on 7 July 2025 that due to logistical constraints, the company currently used to collect unsaleable cloth items (Industrial Rags, Wingfield) is no longer able to offer bagged clothing collections from the Community Centre. The company remains willing to receive items if the Council ships or delivers them to the Wingfield facility.

Staff estimate there are on average 10 full bags per month (these are larger in volume than a large size garbage bag) stored in the Community Centre until they are collected by this company. Other options are currently being considered for the economical and environmentally responsible disposal of unwanted donations.

Current Council Resource Allocation

It is estimated the Community Centres Team currently spends about one day per week supporting the Op Shop.

The volunteer role description and signage in the Op Shop indicates that volunteers are to direct issues or questions to the Council staff, with the Community Centre number prominently displayed in the Op Shop as the number for volunteers to call for help.

The main roles performed by the team are:

1. Management of illegal dumping
2. Sorting of stock
3. Management of items that cannot be sold
4. Volunteer management
5. Op Shop administration

Daily monitoring of donated items is required to ensure the site remains safe and discourage illegal dumping. Items left can be unsellable (such as electrical items) and require sorting and appropriate disposal via skip bins or through the Councils Quick Response Team. Excess or unsold items are bagged and on-donated to Red Nose Foundation as this organisation has a bigger market. Items not fit for on-donation are bagged for collection by Industrial Rags. Volunteers assist in this process.

Operational management involves:

- volunteer rostering and organising replacements or closures when volunteers are sick with the associated social media notifications and signage,
- cash handling, financial reconciliation and receipting and banking of cash takings
- ordering stock
- responding to volunteer and customer queries.

Volunteers are also supported through quarterly meetings conducted by the Community Centre Staff.

Other Council resources are also deployed to perform tasks including provision of skip bins, undertaking building maintenance and repairs, deploying Quick Response teams for dangerous/unacceptable donations and meeting obligations such as WHS audits.

Current Issues

The recent WHS audit and response to mitigate these risks has highlighted the need to increase oversight of the Op Shop operations and to further support volunteers.

With no single officer dedicated to the Op Shop, staff are responding on an ad hoc basis and balancing other role requirements. This task is made more difficult as there are times when only one staff member is available at the neighbouring Community Centre.

The recent clean and consolidation undertaken in the Op Shop has been positively received by staff. It has however highlighted the importance of maintaining the Op Shop in its current state and being proactive in managing donations to minimise the risk of WHS issues recurring.

Council has advised there are volunteers that have a strong sense of ownership over the Op Shop and require more support to work to Council standards and legislated requirements in matters such as WHS.

Additional Resources Required to Manage Risks

To operate to the required standard to mitigate risk and provide value to the community, more staff support is needed. Staff have reported finding it difficult to manage the needs of the Op Shop and their other duties, and that increasing the commitment to the Op Shop is not possible within the current resource allocation. To do so would require diversion from delivering other priority community centre programs.

It is also not considered viable for volunteers to take an oversight or management role as they lack understanding of Council obligations and there are differing views of the minimum standards that need to be met.

The Community Centres Team envisages a more hands on approach estimating approximately 12 hours per week is needed. This will enable more consistent and additional on-site support to volunteers and monitoring and management of donations including:

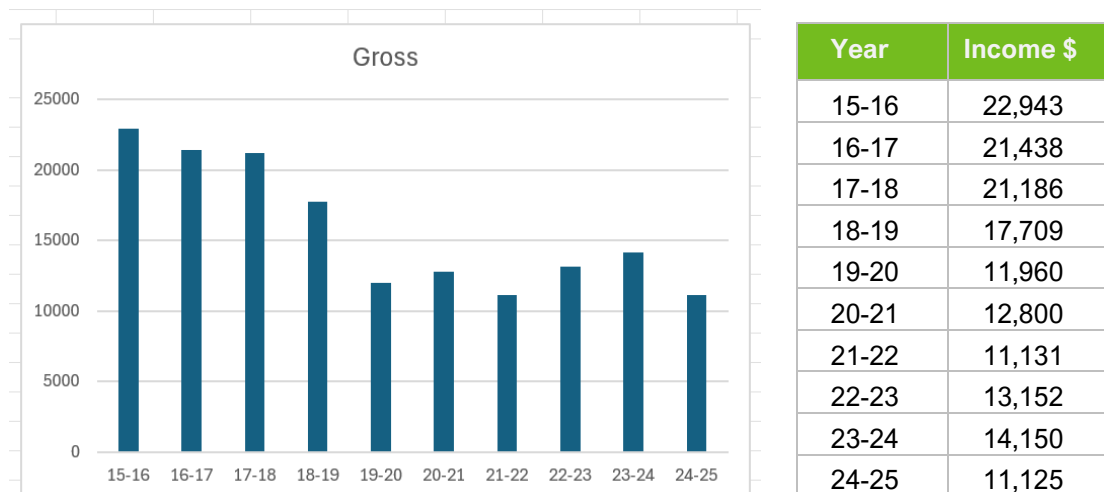
- Daily Management of illegal dumping
- Providing back up when volunteers are away to maintain continuity
- Daily volunteer support and support to ensure consistency (different volunteers each day)
- Direct attendance in the shop – supporting volunteers, customer service, Council/community interactions
- Supporting decision making around accepting and pricing stock
- Ensuring that displays meet WHS standards
- Ensuring manual handling is carried out appropriately
- Marketing and promotion on social media
- Risk management documentation/ understanding shop specific requirements
- Coordinating building maintenance requirements.

Financial performance

Financial records from 2015 to 17 June 2025 have been reviewed to assess the income and costs associated with the Op Shop. It should be noted that the expenses captured in this summary are only those directly related to the budget line for the Op Shop and do not include overheads and other expenses incurred by AHC including staff time, electricity, phone costs, asset planning, audit costs, information technology and corporate support.

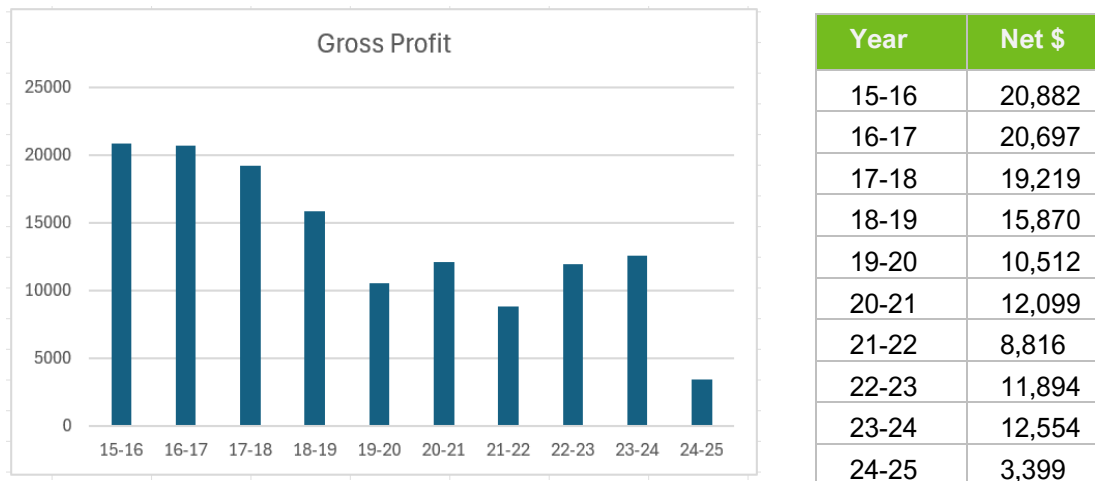
Figure Two provides a summary of income generated by the Op Shop during this period. From the high point in FY2016 of \$22,943 there was a gradual decline down to \$11,960 in FY2019 with income at a relatively steady level since then. The Council staff understand that the other Uniting Church Op Shop in Gumeracha was opened in 2018 which could be a contributing factor to this income decline as could the existence of other stores in surrounding towns and a greater use of on-line shopping during and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure Two: Op Shop Income 2015 to 17 June 2025



When operational expenses are subtracted from this income the gross profit from the Op Shop is provided below in Figure Three (noting that gross profit does not include overhead and other expenditure attributable to the service).

Figure Three: Op Shop Gross Profit 2015 to 17 June 2025



The expenses captured to produce this gross profit include once off items such as new furniture and equipment required within the Op Shop and waste pick up and disposal charges. The lower figures since 2018 reflects not only the decrease in income from sales described above but also an increase in costs such as waste pick up and disposal. Budget figures in 2015-16 indicate this was charged at \$76 per attendance compared with the 2024-25 cost listed as \$231 per attendance.

In addition, these figures include the costs associated with the clean and consolidation required in response to WHS issues. An item of \$5,070 is listed to conduct the declutter, rubbish removal and deep clean process on 7 May 2025 and a separate item of \$824 on 31 May 2025.

Historical and Estimated Profit/Loss

Table Three provides a summary of the Op Shop's overall profit / loss position using the data in Figure Two and Figure Three as well as staff costs and estimated costs for the 2025-26 financial year. Table Three does not include building maintenance costs that are currently estimated to be an approximately \$5,000 per year.

The data has been grouped into the first four financial years (FY 2015-16 to 2018-19) and the following five financial years (FY 2019-20 to 2023-24) to provide average costs and income for these time periods and the resulting average profit/loss position in order to show the decrease in financial performance which occurred after the 2018-19 year. Financial year 2024-25 has been presented separately as there was additional expenditure on the clean up and consolidation process undertaken in that year which is not representative of an average year.

Table Three: Historical and Projected Op Shop Profit/Loss

	FY 15-16 to 18-19 average	FY 19-20 to 23-24 average	FY 24-25 (full year)	FY 25-26 estimate	Notes
Material/ contractor costs	\$1,652	\$1,463	\$7,726	\$7,420	FY 25-26 increased costs reflect increased dumping (an issue for many op shops) these costs include general materials, rag disposal, rapid response services and skip bins.
Staff costs	@\$40/hr 14,400	@\$45/hr 16,200	@\$50/hr 18,000	@\$50/hr 27,000	- Average hourly rate estimate based on 2.5% wage growth per year. Staff time estimated at 8 hours per week for 15-16 to FY 24-25 increasing to 12 hours per week for FY 25-26. - Annual staff time based on Op Shop being open for 45 weeks per year. - FY 25-26 increased staff costs are a result of additional staff time required to meet WHS and contemporary volunteer management practices.
TOTAL COSTS	\$17,852	\$17,663	\$25,726	\$34,420	
TOTAL INCOME	\$20,819	\$14,155	\$12,471	\$12,471	
PROFIT / (LOSS)	\$2,967	(\$3,508)	(\$13,255)	(\$21,949)	

The financial analysis shows the direct operational costs of the Op Shop can be offset by income from sales, however the gross profit is not sufficient to cover Council staff and overhead costs particularly given the need to increase staff hours to manage WHS risks and better support volunteers.

Financial performance of the Op Shop decreased in around 2018/19 which coincided with COVID and the opening of a competing opportunity shop in Gumeracha.

Asset condition

The building that houses the Op Shop has been included in a Council wide building asset assessment (undertaken by Sproutt) that noted this building is structurally sound. This assessment did not however consider matters relating to fixtures and amenity such as access to hot and potable water.

At the site visit it was noted:

- a deep clean had been conducted in May, i.e. four weeks prior to this visit which it was reported had made a significant difference to the building
- clear signage relating to asbestos construction was visible
- there were no obvious building issues observed (other than some areas that appeared to be mould spots) that would prevent continued use as an Op Shop.

Should the building continue to be used as an Op Shop or repurposing considered, further investigation is needed as to whether there are underlying issues such as dampness or other matters that would impact its continued use.

Further investigation (i.e. a detailed building condition assessment) is required to determine whether there are any upgrades required to ensure the building meets standards for continued or alternative use.

KEY ISSUES

This review has identified the following key issues relating to the continued operation of the Op Shop:

1. Lack of strategic alignment with AHC goals, objectives and priorities.
2. Diversion of Community Centre resources away from initiatives aligned with the strategic plan.
3. No financial benefit with performance not sufficient to offset the full cost of service delivery.
4. Increased staff resources required to mitigate risks and increase support to volunteers to ensure a safe environment.
5. Limited community benefit due to the presence of an alternative opportunity shop in the township of Gumeracha as well as over a dozen in other hills townships.

Fulfilling the intended purpose of the Op Shop

The purposes put forward for operating the Op Shop were to provide:

1. Access for the community to low-cost goods
2. Opportunities to reuse and recycle goods and textiles
3. Connection and opportunities for volunteers
4. Income source to support other community centre initiatives

The existence of alternative Op Shops in Gumeracha and surrounding townships provides an alternative way to fulfil purposes 1 and 2.

In relation to purpose 3, the Council has advised alternative volunteering opportunities can be made available to the existing volunteers that have Services Australia Mutual Obligation requirements. These include working in the Green Shed, which both of these volunteers are already involved with. Additionally, if there is an appropriate match, roles for other volunteers may also be available either within the Council or closer to the volunteers homes. These include:

- Gumeracha Treasures Op Shop
- Chat and Connect Program Mt Barker (3 positions)
- Woodside Op Shop
- AHC Gardening program (proposed to be activated)
- AHC Green Shed

In relation to purpose 4, the income being generated by the Op Shop has declined and is no longer meeting the full cost of service delivery. This financial performance is not sufficient to help fund other Community Centre initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Council should consider putting in place a plan to cease operations of the Gumeracha Opportunity Shop in consultation with stakeholders

Observations

- Operating an Opportunity Shop is not aligned with AHC priorities and is not a service offered by other comparable Adelaide councils.
- The financial performance of the Op Shop does not offset the full costs and risks to Council.
- Council is not appropriately geared for this type of service delivery and current resources being used to manage the store are being diverted from delivering other Council community centre priorities.
- The recent clean and consolidation process has provided an opportunity to take some time to consider the future of the Op Shop as immediate WHS issues have been mitigated in the short term.
- Continued management of these risks requires increased resourcing and support for volunteers which will further prevent Community Centre staff delivery on AHC priorities.
- The intended purpose of the Op Shop can be fulfilled through alternative means that better align with the goals, objectives and priorities of AHC.
- There are limited identified benefits from continued operation.
- There may be other organisations (such as charities or not for profits entities) more suited to continuing to provide this service either at the current location (subject to further assessment of the condition of the building and its suitability for leasing) or at another location in the township.

Recommendation 2: Develop and implement an engagement plan that supports staff, volunteers and the community to understand and implement this change

Observations

- Community interest since the clean and consolidation process has raised awareness and in some cases concern about the future of the Op Shop.
- Targeted engagement would benefit the local community and volunteers.
- Development and implementation of a communication plan to inform staff, volunteers and the community of the outcomes of this review and future of the Op Shop will support those involved in implementation.
- Information for volunteers on how they will be supported through the change will be important
- The community can be supported through information on alternative Opportunity Shops and equivalent offerings.

Recommendation 3: Work with volunteers to explore alternative volunteering opportunities

Observations

- There are volunteers that will require support to continue to fulfil their Services Australia Mutual Obligation requirements.
- Alternative volunteering opportunities can be explored where there is a skill match
- It is understood other Opportunity Shops in Gumeracha and in other areas of the Adelaide Hills are seeking volunteers

Recommendation 4: Undertake a detailed condition assessment of the building before deciding on further use of the site

Observations

- A current building report is available but it only considers the structural integrity of the building and was part of a broader review of Council assets.
- A more detailed assessment and identification of any compliance and building standard requirements is needed prior to decisions on whether to use, renovate, mothball or demolish the building.