Consultation Report Informing the Draft Access and Inclusion Plan 2018-2021

Introduction

The NSW Disability inclusion Act 2014 requires Councils to prepare and implement Disability Inclusion Action Plans. In Tweed we call this our Access and Inclusion Plan. To prepare the plan the NSW Act requires Councils to carry out community consultation in particular with people with disabilities. Plans must be submitted to the NSW Disability Council with a report on the consultation process.

Community consultation for the Draft Tweed Shire Access and Inclusion Plan 2018-2021 was carried out within Council and with the community. Consultation within Council commenced in December 2017 with the formation of an internal working group. The community consultation occurred between April and June 2018.

Additional comments were drawn from the 2017 community engagement for the 2017-2027 Community Strategic Plan and from complaints logged in our electronic records system between 2014 and 2017. The following report outlines the consultation process and results.

Information dissemination about the consultation process

Information about the community consultation period was made available in a number of ways. These included:

- Media release
- Tweed Link article
- All staff email
- Email to the Tweed Disability interagency Network (124 members)
- Email to the Tweed Community Care Forum (Aged care network
- Community contacts Community Development Officer Ageing and Disability (see list of focus groups)
- Information flyers distributed to libraries, information centres, community centres and customer service centres

Community Consultation

Consultation Participants
A total of 174 people were involved in the consultation. This included 142 individual community members and 32 Tweed Shire Council staff.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of participation numbers and methods for the community consultation.

Table 1 Community Consultation Methods

Method	Number of Participants
Individual interviews	10
Focus Groups	84
Survey pwd	10
Survey community	26
Online forum	3
Survey tourism	3
Other	6
Total	**142**

Table 2 provides a breakdown of community participant's age range and personal situation.

Table 2 Community Consultation Participants

Age	Percent %	Description	Percent %
18-24	3.8	Person with Disability (PWD)	33.5
25-34	11.4	Family member of PWD	11.2
35-44	9.1	Carer of PWD	20.0
45-54	19.0	Friend of PWD	2.5
55-64	17.4	Disability/Aged Care Worker	5.5
65-74	17.4	Know a PWD	4.3
75-84	15.1	Community member	23.0
85+	6.8		100.00
	100.00		

Geographic Representation

Contributors to the consultation came from all areas of Tweed Shire and from further afield including:

Tweed Shire
Tweed Heads, Tweed Heads South, Tweed Heads West, Banora Point, Bilambil, Terranora, Fingal Head, Dum Dum, Kingscliff, Cabarita, Hastings Point, Pottsville, Murwillumbah, Uki, Chillingham, Crystal Creek, Tyalgum, Stokers Siding.

Outside Tweed Shire
Bilinga, Brisbane (QLD), Coffs Harbour, Brunswick Heads (NSW)

Consultation Methods

Focus Groups

The majority of participants in the community consultation were involved in focus groups. Table 3 provides a list of focus groups and the number of participants in each. The high representation of people with vision impairment reflects the high percentage of people over 65yrs in Tweed Shire.

Table 3 Focus Groups

Group	Number
Blind and Vision Support Group (people with vision impairment and carers	15
Dementia Action Group (people with dementia and carers)	12
Fun Activities Banora Seniors (older people)	10
Blind Citizens Australia (people with vision impairment and carers)	9
Uki community members	9
Shaping Outcomes (parents of children with additional needs)	7
People with hearing impairment (TSC employees)	5
People with disabilities (Equal Access Advisory Committee)	5
Pottsville community members (people with disability, carers and community members)	5
Dementia Pathways Forum (Service providers)	4
Connections Centre (people living with mental illness)	3
Total	**84**

Individual interviews

Ten people participated in individual interviews. Table 4 provides a list of people involved in individual interviews by gender, age and personal situation.

Table 4 Individual Interviews

Person/Age	Description
Woman – late 80s	Vision impaired/mobility challenge English a second language
Man – early 80s	Vision impairment, chronic health condition, long cane user
Woman – early 60s	Vision impairment, guide dog
Woman – late 30s	Parent, undergoing treatment for cancer
Woman – mid 30s	Parent, vision impairment, guide dog
Man – early 30s	Hearing/vision impaired, chronic health condition, guide dog
Man – early 30s	Down syndrome
Woman – early 20s	Down syndrome
Woman – early 20s	Autism spectrum disorder, assistance dog
Woman – early 20s	Intellectual disability

Surveys

Three surveys were available. Two surveys were designed to cover the four key focus areas outlined in the Local Government NSW Disability (LGNSW) inclusion Action Planning Guidelines. One of these surveys was designed for people with a disability and the other for the general community. The third brief survey was designed to capture feedback from tourists about their experience of access and inclusion in Tweed Shire. This was distributed to three tourist information centres and a small selection of tourist accommodation venues.

Results

To align this report with the Access and Inclusion Plan the results are grouped under the four key focus areas outlined in the Local Government NSW Disability Inclusion Action Planning Guidelines. These are:

1. Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours
2. Creating liveable communities
3. Supporting access to meaningful employment
4. Improving access to services through better systems and processes

Focus Area 1: Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours
Survey participants were asked whether they think Tweed Shire is an inclusive community.

To the statement "Tweed Shire is an inclusive community" responses included:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5.9%	72.5%	11.8%	8.8%	1%

A total of 78.4% of respondents feel that Tweed Shire is an inclusive community. In a general sense they felt that overall people are friendly, helpful and accepting of difference. Many people felt that the smallness of the community influenced the sense of belonging and inclusion. This was the case for the larger centres as well as the smaller villages.

Many people talked about staff in larger supermarkets being very helpful if they see you have a disability or are older and need assistance. Others mentioned the many interest groups and activities for people, particularly seniors, to be involved in for social contact.

A number of issues are still causing concern. These mainly relate to lack of awareness and the impact of certain behaviours on people with disability.

The need for Community Education
Many respondents talked about the need for community education to raise awareness about inclusion. People suggested that the education could happen at a number of levels including in schools, on public media and on a local level in businesses and clubs. The main messages were about treating people with disabilities as equal members of the community. This particularly related to

communication. Many people told stories about being talked down to or ignored on the basis of their disability or frail aged appearance.

When people were asked about barriers to inclusion when accessing services some key findings emerged. For health services such as going to the doctor and being in hospital the most common barrier was the attitude and behaviour of medical, nursing and other staff lack of understanding the person's disability.

When shopping the most common barrier was finding your way around and being able to ask for and get help.

Using Shared Pathways
Another significant issue highlighted was the inconsiderate behaviour of people using shared pathways. This behaviour includes people:

- with headphones using their mobile devices and not looking where they are going riding skate boards and bikes approaching at speed
- walking three and four abreast taking up the whole width of pathway
- walking dogs that are not under their control

People said these behaviours endanger those with vision and hearing impairment and assistance animals who cannot see or hear people approaching. Respondents said there seems to be a lack of awareness that a long white cane means the person cannot see. It was noted that people navigating with white canes wander from side to side as they move along the path. Stories included many examples of people using white canes being run into, knocked over and white canes broken.

People have assistance or service animals for many different reasons. These animals are specially trained to assist people with conditions such as vision impairment, hearing loss, autism, mental illness and mobility impairment.

Assistance animals and guide dogs are essential for the safe access and inclusion of their owners.   Everyone has a responsibility to make sure these important animals can do their job properly. Many guide dog owners told stories about being attacked by off leash dogs not under control. This traumatises the guide dog and their owner and has a significant impact on their ability to move confidently around the community.

Parking Behaviour
The first issue raised was people parking on and across the footpath blocking access. People said this behaviour actually endangers all pedestrians who often have to move out onto the road to get past the parked car. People with vision impairment said this is extremely dangerous as they are unable to navigate around the car and proceed safely. Other people said this behaviour is particularly difficult for people using mobility aids such as wheelchairs, mobility scooters and walking aids who may be completely blocked if there is no kerb ramp onto the road.

The second issue raised was unauthorised drivers parking in Designated Accessible Parking Bays (DAPBs). They said DAPBs are placed close to where people need to go such as shops, health services, parks and public toilets because they have limited mobility or other conditions that impact their ability to move easily about in the community. People with a permit to park in DAPBs said when they can't park in these spots they can't do simple things like go shopping, use a toilet or go to a park. They also said that when they challenge someone who has parked there illegally they can get abused and this makes them feel unsafe.

Focus Area 2: Creating liveable communities
Survey participants were asked whether they think Tweed Shire is an accessible community.

To the statement "Tweed Shire is generally an accessible community" responses included:

Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2.2%	49.5%	27.5%	19.7%	1.1%

A total of 51.7% of respondents feel that Tweed is an accessible community. Compared to 78.4% for Tweed as an inclusive community this result shows we have more to do to improve physical access.

Most people said that the level of access varied across the Tweed with some area better than others. There were recurring areas commonly mentioned where barriers exist.

Footpaths
Many people mentioned the poor state of footpaths in suburban streets where people live. The most common issues raised concerning suburban footpaths were lack of footpaths, gaps in footpath journeys, inaccessible or lack of kerb ramps, poor maintenance to remove barriers such as broken sections, overgrown vegetation and other barriers blocking the path. For footpaths in commercial business districts and shopping precincts the most common issues were barriers created by footpath trading, inaccessible kerb ramps and the need for more pedestrian crossings.

Entry to premises
The next access barrier was getting into smaller businesses and shops which have steps. This was raised as a particular problem in main street shopping areas where smaller businesses are in older buildings. They said this affects many cafes and restaurants along with other businesses and prevents people from connecting socially and shopping locally.

Outside Places
To participate in all outdoor places including public parks, the beach or inland water way, markets and festivals the barriers were lack of continuous footpaths from home, car park or transport link and finding accessible toilets.

Access to Transport and Parking

The need for more accessible public transport particularly public buses came out as a significant gap in our community.

Inadequate parking at all venues was mentioned as a major concern and a barrier to participation. This was highlighted when accessing essential services such as doctors, dentists and hospital.

Focus Area 3: Supporting access to meaningful employment for people with disabilities

There were four issues covered in this section. The first asked people to identify the access barriers they experience when working or volunteering. The most common barriers were access to assistive technology and adjustments to the workplace and the need for more inclusive attitudes from colleagues.

The second section asked people to identify barriers to finding a job. The most common barriers mentioned were applying for a job and building positive relationships.

The third question asked what would most likely improve opportunities for employment. The most common responses where the need to design roles for people with disabilities and providing flexible working hours and locations.

The final question asked what people thought would most likely prevent opportunities for employment for people with disabilities. The two most common responses were people's attitudes to disabilities and lack of roles suitable for people with disabilities.

Focus Area 4: Improving access to services through better systems and processes

The questions in this section related to people accessing services from Council. The most common way people contact Council is by phone. The most common ways people get information from Council is via the Tweed Link or website followed by in person or by mail.

Most respondents had had positive experiences in communication with Council. People with disabilities chose the most accessible means of communication and information that met their specific needs.

Council Consultation

Fourteen Council staff are members of an internal working group formed to guide the development and implementation of the Plan. The working group meets regularly to provide guidance and advice to the project leader, Community Development Officer Ageing and Disability.

Eighteen additional staff were consulted to identify issues and priorities for the Plan. Staff involved in the consultation process came from across the organisation and represented all levels in the hierarchy.

Working Group Organisational Mapping

The working group carried out a mapping exercise within their individual work units to gauge current practice and barriers to access for inclusion in our roles and functions as a local government authority.

Working group members used a series of questions to map attitudes and behaviours, practice and accountability in their work units.

What Council does best

The mapping reported that what we believe we do best is the design and construction of accessible infrastructure and the provision of accurate information on access for inclusion.

Barriers and challenges

A number of barriers and challenges in achieving access for inclusion were identified.

The challenges included:

- Site constraints (includes environmental, older facilities and event venues)
- Budget
- Human resources
- Technology
- Gaps in knowledge
- Lack of technical assistance such as checklists
- Practicalities of delivering, including time constraints and competing priorities
- Over-ride by (external) client
- Expectations of clients in terms of cost management where access considerations were discussed

Attitudes and behaviours in the organisation

A number of important findings were reported in the mapping exercise. These included:

- Most staff have awareness about access for inclusion while only half demonstrate a commitment to creating an inclusive environment.
- When selecting products from suppliers a few staff consistently considered universal design but most only when relevant to a project or when directed to do so.
- Although managers infrequently communicate about access for inclusion they do promote and support non-discrimination and regulatory compliance and embrace difference in the workplace.
- Most leaders are not formally accountable for access and inclusion goals in our reporting framework at present.

Working Group Priorities
The working group identified three main areas for improvement.

- The need to develop systems and processes to incorporate Universal Design into project planning (includes appropriate consultation at all stages of a project)
- A process to make informed decisions about providing full accessibility versus partial (outside mandatory compliance regime where other issues impact such as legislation, budget or site constraints)
- Review and update Council information platforms and methods of communication

Additional staff consultation
Additional staff were consulted to confirm priorities, responsibilities and actions in the draft plan and as a follow up to the working group mapping exercise.

These included focus groups with the Community Development Team and Community Services Team. The Community Services Team is a registered NDIS Provider of Support Coordination, a Regional Assessment Service for My Aged Care and Commonwealth Home Support Program.

Meetings were also held with Managers/Coordinators of Roads and Storm Water, Recreational Services, Development Assessment, Natural Resource Management, Strategic Planning and Urban Design, Communications and Customer Experience and Human resources.

As a result of these meetings a number of priorities were established for inclusion as actions in the Plan.

Conclusion
The series of consultations undertaken provided extensive and detailed information that has informed the development of the Draft Access and Inclusion Plan 2018-2021. Community members shared many experiences in their lives highlighting the things that work and those that prevent inclusion. This next Plan will build on what we achieved with the first Access and inclusion Plan and gradually create a community where everyone can participate.

The importance of using a universal design framework cannot be understated. This provides a framework for practice as well as a way of thinking about designing for inclusion in its broadest sense. In this way we plan, design and build everything with everyone in mind. In this way we celebrate diversity by demonstrating our commitment to an inclusive community.