

Minutes of the Equal Access Advisory Committee Meeting held on Wednesday 10 April 2024

Venue:

Mike Raynor Room, Level 2, Tweed Heads Administration Office, Tweed Shire Council and MS Teams meeting.

Time:

10:00 am - 12:00 pm (AEST)

Present:

Pat Miller (Chairperson); Colin Usher; Kyle Sculley; Karen Sculley; Suzanne Hudson; Cr Meredith Dennis; Cr James Owen; Lisa Francisco; Jane Moad; Jodie Hewett; Lily Morgan; Giselle Benitez Hetherington (Secretariat and Minutes Officer). Note part-time presence of some members.

Apologies:

Vanessa Riggs; Shannon Carruth.

Agenda Items:**A1. Meeting open and Acknowledgement of Country**

The meeting commenced at 10.05am, with Pat Miller welcoming attendees and paying respect to First Nations Elders past, present, and emerging.

Absences were noted, including Cr Dennis and Cr Owen. Quorum was noted as not established, as per item 6.2 of the Terms of Reference, which provide for the presence of at least one Councillor member. Pat acknowledged that discussions may proceed for informational purposes, however, any voting on recommendations would be postponed until a quorum was achieved.

Pat proposed adding the following 4 matters to item A6 Business Arising, and suggested cutting the timeframe for item A2 to accommodate these:

- Reporting on the Tweed Access and Inclusion Plan
- Discussion on accommodation issues affecting community members
- Tweed Mall redevelopment proposal
- Stipend for members for the next term

A2. Draft policy: Assistance animals in Council-managed places

Giselle provided an update, as per Action Register Open item 8, outlining the project planning and milestones for drafting, review and public exhibition of a policy. Members discussed stakeholder engagement and consultation process, where mapping of stakeholders to identify interested and influential parties is underway. Members were asked to contribute to this process by identifying relevant stakeholders for communication and engagement planning.

Action Item:

1. **Committee members are asked to contribute to stakeholder identification for communication and engagement planning regarding the Assistance Animals policy.**

Jane Moad joined the meeting in-person at 10:15am.

A3. Draft Energy Access and Poverty Plan and Co-design Workshop

Jane Moad presented a project addressing energy poverty in the Tweed region, which aims to align with Council's reporting obligations for climate change as a signatory to the Global Covenant of Mayors, focussing on affordability, accessibility, and sustainable energy provision.

Member discussion highlighted structural issues with electricity supply, concerns about the complexity of electricity bills and the challenges vulnerable consumers faced.

Discussion centred on promoting an upcoming workshop, prioritising actions to reach service providers and community members. Members highlighted the importance of accessible information and shared experiences, emphasising the need for clear information and simple language and the need to address concerns about existing energy relief schemes. The conversation concluded with encouragement to promote widespread participation in the workshop.

Action Items:

- 1. Committee members are encouraged to attend the upcoming workshop**
- 2. Staff to continue to promote workshop, consider targeting over 50s communities and retirement villages for diverse stakeholder representation.**
- 3. Staff to make efforts to present information in an accessible format to facilitate participation from seniors and individuals with disability.**

Lily Morgan joined the meeting via MS Teams at 10:28am.

Jane Moad left the meeting at 10:30am.

A4. NSW Transport Social Policy

The item focused on discussing Transport for NSW's invitation to a Roundtable event concerning wheelchair accessible transport services. Giselle and Lily led discussions, with members providing input and suggested based on feedback gathered from the Tweed Disability Network through a survey.

Members discussed concerns about the reliability of accessible taxis, lack of skilled drivers and knowledge among businesses and services, misleading claims about accessibility, safety issues, after-hours transport needs, financial accessibility, and integration of technology. Karen and Kyle Sculley were designated to attend the Roundtable event and provide feedback for a potential written submission to the draft Transport Social Policy.

Action Items:

- 1. Karen and Kyle Sculley to attend the Roundtable event and advocate on these issues.**
- 2. Karen and Kyle to provide feedback after the event for a potential written submission to the draft Transport Social Policy, working with Giselle and Lily.**

Jodie Hewett joined the meeting in-person and Lily Morgan left the meeting at 11:00am.

A5. Recreation Infrastructure Program

Jodie presented the Community Assets Programme, a \$15 million initiative aimed at restoring and enhancing community infrastructure impacted by recent floods. The program, spanning 57 projects, will prioritise flood resilience and improved access, integrating actions from the Tweed Access and Inclusion Plan and adhering to universal design principles. The program will allocate funding to recreational facilities, new public toilets and retrofitting community buildings, with efforts to coordinate and develop design guidelines to ensure universal access.

Jodie invited members to advise on how they wish to be involved in this project. Members emphasised the importance of informing access principles, prioritising review of representative projects, and making accessibility information publicly available. Members thanked Jodie and her team for their efforts to secure the funding and the positive impacts anticipated on the community.

Cr Meredith Dennis joined the meeting in-person at 11:08am.

Giselle noted that a quorum had been established.

Cr James Owen joined the meeting via MS Teams at 11:21am.

Action Items:

- 1. Jodie to present, at next meeting, priority or representative projects (i.e. facilities with high community attendance or multiple access measures) for review and planning of on-site inspection and testing of access measures before public opening.**

Jodie Hewett left the meeting at 11:30am.

B. Business Arising

B1. Event / Activity series:

Giselle provided an update on recent actions as per Action Register Open Item 10, including the Tweed Disability Network's planning for activities in 2024. Key themes highlighted the importance of person-to-person gatherings, fostering connections, providing activities for young people, and offering volunteering opportunities. Collaboration with the Communications team aims to ensure accessible event formats, with plans for a quarterly calendar of events and discussions about a program for International Day of Persons with Disabilities in May.

B2. Celebrating Inclusion and sharing stories:

Members discussed ongoing collaboration with communications staff to create media as the Committee concludes its tenure. Topics of focus include the Committee goals and achievements, Call for expressions of interest for the new term, and the endorsement of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

B3. Endorsement of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail:

Members referred to Appendix C to review and approve the draft statement of endorsement of the proposed access measures to be installed at the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

Moved: Pat Miller

Seconded: Colin Usher

RECOMMENDATION that the Equal Access Advisory Committee recommends the following of statement of endorsement of the access measures programmed to be installed at the Northern Rivers Rail Trail:

“The Tweed Equal Access Advisory Committee is proud to endorse and support increased access measures to the Northern Rivers Rail Trail.

We commend Tweed Shire Council's staff who have put an enormous effort into thinking through and building more accessible experiences.

The 'Cycling Without Age' initiative at Burringbar is a fantastic step towards increasing the overall inclusivity of the Rail Trail.

Members of the Committee met the 'Cycling Without Age' Burringbar project team and took their equipment for a trial run at Burringbar on February 5, a great experience for people who have impaired mobility.

We look forward to improved access to the Rail Trail as Council develops facilities. We also look forward to a wider cross-section of the community using what has proved to be a successful, well-used feature of our Shire.

Signatories: All members"

B4. Tweed Access and Inclusion Plan Reporting:

Pat led discussions on the Council's reporting of disability employment, highlighting concerns about the lack of specific numbers for staff with disabilities in annual reports. Members acknowledged the challenges in identifying and reporting disabilities among employees, and that current reporting practices were based on best available data (as discussed at 5 February meeting). Cr Owen noted receiving additional advice regarding Council's review of recruitment policy, particularly concerning driver's licenses, and has committed to sharing this information with members. Plans to address barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities and anticipated changes in reporting requirements by the state government were discussed, with a commitment from Council staff to provide updates on efforts to improve transparency in employment data.

Action Items:

- 1. Council staff to provide updates on changes in reporting standards and efforts to improve transparency in employment data.**
- 2. Cr Owen is tasked with sharing the advice regarding Council's review of recruitment policy, specifically regarding driver's licenses, with all members.**

B5. Tweed Mall redevelopment proposal:

Pat initiated a discussion on the Committee's potential role in advising on access measures for the proposed Tweed Mall redevelopment. Members expressed interest in collaborating with Council's planning team or the Northern Rivers Planning Panel for input on access considerations. Giselle emphasised the need to review the Committee's mandate before discussing the project further, with members requesting the opportunity to invite the project team for a presentation once alignment with the mandate was confirmed.

Action Item:

- 1. Giselle to review the Terms of Reference and seek advice to determine if discussing the Tweed Mall redevelopment is within the Committee's scope.**

B6. Accommodation displacement advocacy:

Colin and Suzanne shared their personal experiences of displacement from their accommodations, shedding light on issues resonating with many community members.

- Concerning Shaping Outcomes, Colin outlined the organisation's history and recent eviction notice from the Tweed Hospital site without recognition or compensation of the organisation's ownership and investment in the building structures. This has prompted legal exploration and community mobilisation efforts, including media campaigns and petitions. Despite these challenges, the organisation has received local support and offer of potential

relocation. Members discussed their role in raising awareness and influencing decision-makers, highlighting the importance of these minutes as a public record and the Tweed Disability Network as a platform for awareness-raising and support.

- Regarding Suzanne's situation, the discussion highlighted her impending displacement due to the property owner's decision to sell her Homes NSW managed home. Temporary accommodation options provided by Homes NSW are deemed inadequate for Suzanne's disability needs, raising concerns about her employment, independence, and the risk of homelessness. Limited responses from local representatives compounded the challenges. Members deliberated on avenues for support and advocacy, emphasising the need for policies addressing the housing needs of people with disabilities and encouraging Suzanne's participation in the Affordable Housing Strategy community survey.

Action Items:

- 1. Colin is encouraged to use the Tweed Disability Network as a platform for advocacy and support, urging community members to support the petition and spread awareness.**
- 2. Suzanne is encouraged to communicate with Councillors to seek letters of support to highlight the importance of their housing stability and mental well-being.**
- 3. Suzanne and members are encouraged to advocate for affordable and accessible housing options through Council initiatives, such as the Growth Management and Housing Strategy and Affordable Housing Strategy.**

B7. Stipend for members for the next term

Pat raised the possibility of offering a stipend to committee members in the future. Lisa pointed out that the end-of-year performance review would be the proper avenue to discuss and consider this suggestion.

B8. Priorities for 13 June meeting (Final meeting)

Giselle reminded members that according to the Terms of Reference, the end-of-year performance review process must be conducted, initiated by the Chair. This process entails members completing a survey before the meeting, with the findings discussed collectively during the Committee session.

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Equal Access Advisory Committee is tentatively scheduled for Thursday 13 June 2024.

The meeting closed at 12:15pm.

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S COMMENTS:

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S RECOMMENDATIONS: