ARMIDALE
Regional Council

Disability Inclusion Action Plan
2017-2021

Unleash the opportunities

www.armidaleregional.nsw.gov.au

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Executive Summary

It is with great pleasure that I present the Armidale Region's Disability Inclusion Action Plan. The plan is the next step along the journey of improving the lives of people with disability in our region and moves us closer to a fully inclusive society for all.

No one should be excluded from the opportunities that are available to us, but unfortunately everyday people with disability face barriers to participation.

This plan is about ensuring Council and the rest of the community now make the choices to consult, to involve and to plan with consideration of those living with disability.

The plan sets a clear direction for progress over the next four years and beyond, to tackle the sometimes difficult and slow process of change and set an example in access and inclusion for others to follow. There are a number of key focus areas in the plan including developing positive community attitudes, creating liveable communities for everyone, and creating employment opportunities.

This Plan contains a mixture of aspirational and deliverable outcomes in support of a fully inclusive society for all. The determination of priorities, the allocation of responsibilities and the identification of the necessary resources are the next key steps in progressing this Plan.

This is an important plan for us. A plan which underpins the type of community we stand for in the Armidale Region.

Peter Dennis
CEO

National and Legislative Context

In 2014, the NSW Parliament passed the *Disability Inclusion Act*, which sets out the need for the NSW Disability Inclusion Plan. The NSW Disability Inclusion Plan is about ensuring state and local governments, and the rest of the community, now make the choices to consult, to involve and to plan with consideration of those living with disability to ensure a fully inclusive society.

It marks a new direction for NSW at a time of great change in the disability sector. The sector is moving away from a model which centred on what people with disability cannot do, to one which seeks to remove the obstacles created by society and empowers people to achieve their full potential and experience all that life has to offer. https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/reforms/developing-the-nsw-disability-inclusion-plan

BACKGROUND

The start of the journey toward the NSW Disability Inclusion Act was Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2008. This signified a commitment by all tiers of government to eradicate obstacles faced by people living with disability. This was followed in 2010 by the National Disability Strategy which set out a 10 year national plan for implementing the obligations under the UNCRPD.
https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/national_disability_strategy_2010_2020.pdf

The diagram below shows the Commonwealth and State legislation that informs the development of local government disability access and inclusion planning.
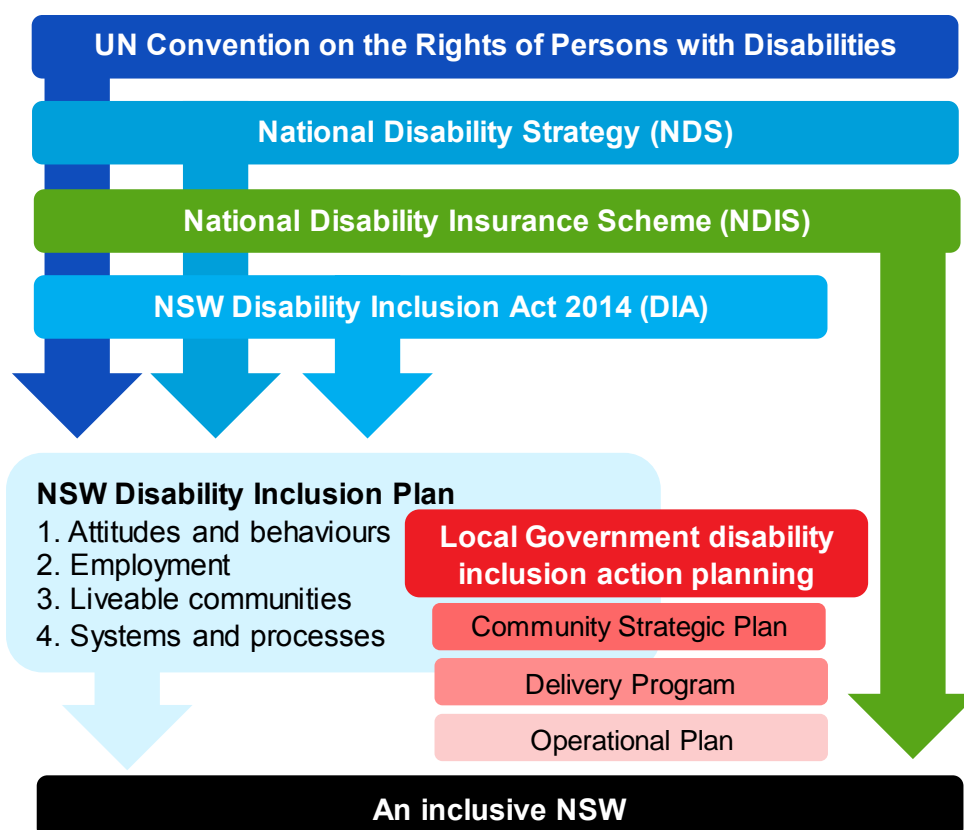

Image source: Local Government NSW and NSW Family and Community Service - Disability Inclusion Action Plan guidelines

These commitments have driven a reform agenda in NSW which will shift attitudes across governments and communities, to move beyond charity and to take a "rights" based approach to people living with disability accessing all aspects of community life.

Local government has specific roles and responsibilities across a range of policies and programs that impact on people living with disability, their families and carers. The Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) does not change the nature of these roles and responsibilities however seeks to create a more cohesive and inclusive approach across all its services and programs.

The former Armidale Dumaresq Council (ADC) prior to May 2016 had in place a Disability Action Plan (DAP). This is the 3rd 4 year DAP the former ADC adopted. In May 2016 the new Armidale Regional Council (ARC) was proclaimed resulting in the merging of the Armidale Dumaresq Council and the Guyra Shire Council. This Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) will be the first for the newly amalgamated Armidale Regional Council.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1   Aims of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)

The aim of the DIAP is to break down barriers which hinder the fundamental right of people living with disability to choose how they live their lives, to access opportunities and enjoy all the benefits of living and working in our community.

The DIAP plays a critical role in identifying and delivering on practical measures to turn good intentions into action by Council.

Local Government NSW developed a set of guidelines for local government which will assist all local councils to effectively plan for and deliver on the diverse needs of people with disability in their community.

http://www.lgnsw.org.au/files/imce-uploads/127/nsw-local-government-disability-inclusion-action-planning-guidelines-5.11.15-2.pdf

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2. COUNCIL'S ROLE IN THE COMMUNITY

Council works closely with state and federal Governments, as well as other community based organisations, to ensure our resources are targeted to add value to each agency's programs and projects. State and federal governments are responsible for ensuring people have access to services such as health care, education, police, housing, emergency management and other social services to support and improve quality of life. In NSW, this is outlined in the *NSW Premier's Priorities 2016* https://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/premiers-priorities/

The Armidale region has a broad range of community based organisations which address a diversity of social needs in areas such as youth, disability, Aboriginal, migrants and refugees, mental health, aged care facilities and programs, and housing affordability.

Council has a range of roles it plays in delivering outcomes to the community including:

Provider of direct services

Council will provide services such as building regulations and development, public health, local roads and footpaths, parks and playing fields, libraries, waste disposal, access and inclusion, and local events.

A partner in providing facilities or programs

Council will provide a range of facilities and programs in partnership with the state and federal Government which meet the social, cultural and recreational needs of the community.

Leader

Council will identify key community issues and work collaboratively with key stakeholders to respond where appropriate. This leadership can be in the form of advocacy, facilitation or negotiation.

Planner

Council will undertake research, provide information, and in consultation with community stakeholders, develop and evaluate ways to resolve identified issues.

Capacity Builder

Council will work closely with community groups and local service agencies to meet local needs. We will mentor and/or assist community groups to obtain the necessary resources through partnerships with other agencies.

Advocate

Council will defend the human rights of people living with disability.

3. DISABILITY INCLUSION FOCUS AREAS

The guidelines designed by the Local Government NSW include four focus areas.

3.1 Focus Area 1 – Developing positive community attitudes & behaviours

The attitudes and behaviours of the general community towards people with disability have been described as the single greatest barrier to full access and inclusion. Consultation to date has identified that attitudes towards people with disability are often determined by ignorance, fear, or lack of opportunity to interact. It is important that council staff and Councillors display a positive attitude to people with disability and focus on measures to support positive and inclusive attitudes and behaviours across the community.

Suggested actions to be undertaken by Council include:

- Integrating training on access and inclusion into staff induction practices

- Develop a corporate training plan which includes training on access and inclusion for all staff

- Include images of people with disability in mainstream publications and in promotion of mainstream events, not just for disability specific events

- Developing public messages and campaigns that highlight inclusion and recognise the rights and contribution of people with disability in the community

- Involving people with disability in the development of communication campaigns regarding inclusion.

3.2 Focus Area 2 – Creating liveable communities

Liveable communities are important for all people in the community and are achieved by applying the principles of universal design http://universaldesign.ie/What-is-Universal-Design/The-7-Principles/#p1 Attention and resources should be focused on the elements of community life that are of highest importance to people with disability. Creating liveable communities is more than modifying the physical environment,it covers areas such as public housing design, access to transport, community recreation, council policies and social engagement.

Suggested actions to be undertaken by Council might include:

- Providing accessible toilets in all public buildings

- Providing change tables (including considering an adult change table in the CBD) in appropriate locations

- Providing continuous accessible paths of travel between facilities and services in town centres https://draftingr.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/AS1428.1-2009-Continuous-Accessible-Path-of-Travels-1.pdf

- Going beyond access standards to apply the principles of universal design in the planning of new infrastructure and buildings

- Engaging people with disability in the design and planning phases of new infrastructure and buildings to support truly accessible and inclusive assets (especially as current building standards can be inadequate)

- Ensuring community events are accessible through early consideration of venues, transport, toilets, parking and accessibility

- Conducting audits of buildings owned or leased by council to assess compliance with Australian standards for access and mobility (AS1428 parts 1 to 5)

- Ensuring all community recreation, cultural and social programs are inclusive and accessible.

3.3 Focus Area 3 – Employment

Employment and economic security for most people are closely related. Employment contributes to independence and feelings of self-worth, social interaction and mental health, and increases opportunities to support individual choice and control. Employment rates for people with disability are significantly lower than those without disability across all sectors. People with disability experience multiple barriers at all stages of the employment process, ranging from inaccessible interview venues, lack of reasonable adjustments to the work environment, poor career planning opportunities, rigid role descriptions and online testing that may place applicants at a disadvantage. These factors reduce their opportunities to gain and retain or improve employment. Organisational commitment to workforce diversity and inclusion is also closely linked to strong business performance.

Suggested actions undertaken by Council might include:

- Making diversity and inclusion a key consideration for strategic workforce planning and develop position advertisements that welcome disability

- Designing role specifications and recruitment processes to optimise the opportunities given to all applicants to demonstrate their merits against the job requirements

- Incorporating strategies and plans into learning and development opportunities as well as career planning

- Facilitate work opportunities for people with disability by developing targeted mentoring and work experience programs

- Develop an identified training program based on needs and resources required to support current and future employees with disability

- Making equity and access key criteria for decisions about physical infrastructure, and information and communications technology

- Reasonable adjustment to the workplace to change a work process, practice, procedure or environment to support an employee with disability to perform their job

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

A common issue for people with disability is the difficulty in navigating systems and processes to access the services and supports and information they need in the community. Some of these difficulties stem from the quality of service and training of front line personnel, the systems and processes required to access services, and the lack of accessible options for communicating, accessing information or providing input or feedback.

A number of communication formats should be considered to provide accessibility for people with a range of disabilities. For example:

- **Vision impairments** – audio, audio description, Braille, telephone

- **Learning disabilities and literacy difficulties** – audio, audio description, easy read, easy access, subtitles

- **Hearing** – Auslan, subtitling, textphone, SMS

- **Co-ordination difficulties** – large print, audio, audio description, telephone.

Examples of actions to support improvements in this area might include:

- Ensuring all service information is available in a range of formats to support different needs and capabilities

- Ensuring service users have access to communications supports such as hearing loops, touch screens and translation services

- Ensuring feedback and complaint mechanisms can be accessed by people with a range of disabilities

- Ensuring the web site content is compliant with at least conformance level AA in the W3Cs Web Content Accessibility Guidelines which ensures broad community input https://w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag

- Providing a mechanism for feedback on access and inclusion in the council area

- Ensuring internal systems and processes are designed to allow for inclusion of staff with a range of disabilities

4. LOCAL DEMOGRAPHICS

ABS estimated residential population of the Armidale Regional Council LGA is 30,045. Of this population 1,307 people or 4.6% reported needing help in their day to day lives due to disability.
http://profile.id.com.au/armidale/assistance

The table below shows an increase in the number of people needing day to day assistance and also reflects an ageing population trend.

## Table 1 Need for Assistance with core activities

Armidale Regional Council area - Persons (Usual residence)	2011			2006			Change
Assistance needed by age group (years)	Number	% of total age group	Regional NSW %	Number	% of total age group	Regional NSW %	2006 to 2011
0 to 4	20	1.2	1.1	14	0.8	1.0	+6
5 to 9	44	2.4	3.0	41	2.2	2.2	+3
10 to 19	89	1.9	2.6	73	1.5	2.0	+16
20 to 59	358	2.5	3.2	332	2.3	2.9	+26
60 to 64	69	4.4	7.3	84	6.3	6.4	-15
65 to 69	88	7.0	7.7	51	4.6	6.3	+37
70 to 74	97	9.2	9.6	68	8.0	8.9	+29
75 to 79	111	14.6	14.8	107	14.1	14.8	+4
80 to 84	139	22.7	24.7	139	28.2	26.7	0
85 and over	292	51.7	48.3	245	52.2	49.4	+47
Total persons needing assistance	**1,307**	**4.6**	**5.8**	**1,154**	**4.2**	**5.1**	**+153**

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2011

Table 2 Comparison with Regional NSW

Need for assistance with core activities, 2011

■ Armidale Regional Council area   ■ Regional NSW

Persons who need assistance by age group (years)
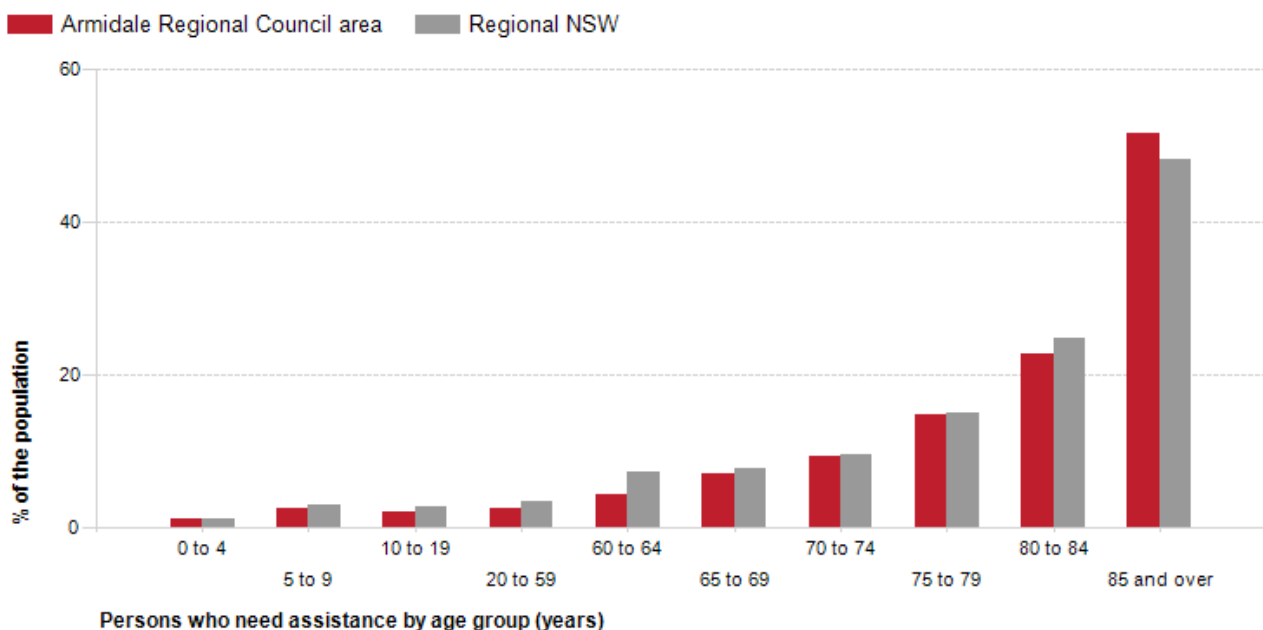
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2011 (Usual residence data)
Compiled and presented in profile.id by .id, the population experts.

.id the population experts

4.1 Summary

Analysis of the need for assistance of people in the Armidale Regional Council area compared to Regional NSW shows that there is a lower proportion of people who reported needing assistance with core activities. However in the age category 85 and over there is a higher proportion of people who reported needing assistance with day to day activities.

Overall, 4.6% of the population reported needing assistance with core activities, compared with 5.8% for Regional NSW.

The major differences in the age groups reporting a need for assistance in the Armidale Regional Council area and Regional NSW were:

- A larger percentage of persons aged 85 and over (51.7% compared to 48.3%)

- A smaller percentage of persons aged 60 to 64 (4.4% compared to 7.3%)

- A smaller percentage of persons aged 80 to 84 (22.7% compared to 24.7%).

5. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

A community engagement strategy was developed and the information gathered from this engagement process informs the way forward for Council in relation to accessibility and inclusion. The engagement process included:-

- a series of focus group meetings in the towns of Armidale and Guyra (42 people in attendance);

- a community survey was developed and distributed and was accessible via the ARC website or by hard copy form at a number of locations in and around the ARC including the libraries in Armidale and Guyra, the HACC Centre in Guyra, the Administration Buildings in Armidale and Guyra and the Kent House Community (47 surveys collected);

- All local area committees were sent an information sheet outlining the aim of the DIAP and an electronic version of the community survey;

- An internal staff survey was also designed and circulated amongst ARC staff (10 staff participated).

A summary of the results of staff that completed the survey is below. The results reflect only a small sample of staff surveyed.

Table 3 Range of disabilities identified by staff

Type of disability	Percentage
Physical	25%
Sensory, including, hearing, vision or speech impairments	12.5%
Intellectual	0%
Autism Spectrum Disorder	12.5%
Neurological impairment or Acquired brain injury	0%
Learning disability including dyslexia	12.5%
Mental health disorder or psychosocial disability	25%
Chronic health condition or illness which has a significant impact in your life	37.5%
Prefer not to say	0%
Other	25%

- 75% of staff are comfortable discussing their disability, along with any consequent workplace alterations/requirements, with their supervisor;

- 37.5% of staff did not want to disclose their disability

- 75% of staff disagree language used about their disability makes them feel uncomfortable

- 75% of staff disagree there are misunderstandings about their disability

- 75% of staff agree their disability does not create a barrier to career development

- 71.43% of staff agree work adjustments are made in the workplace to cater for their disability

- 87.5% of staff agree they do not experience barriers to accessing assistive technology or workplace modifications

- 87.5% of staff agree they are able to access Council facilities or other areas in their workplace

- 100% of staff said they experience no barriers accessing Council's IT systems

- 100% of staff said they experience no barriers to access during emergency evacuation procedures

Key themes emerged throughout the community consultation process. These themes are summarised as follows:

Awareness and recognition

Participants felt there was a lack of understanding in the community regarding the contributions people living with disability make to community life. People living with disability want to be treated with respect and dignity and have the same opportunity to fully participate in community life.

The community do not understand that disability is diverse, can be hidden and stereotyping, assumptions and generalisations create barriers to people living with disability to participate fully in community life.

Employment Opportunities

Participants felt that many people with a disability were frequently financially disadvantaged due to reduced access to employment opportunities. Employees seem to concentrate on what a person with a disability can't do, instead of concentrating on what a person can do. Council should develop an employee assistance scheme aimed at providing work experience and work opportunities for people living with disability.

Public Access

Participants highlighted the importance of good public access in enabling them to fully participate in community life. Public access includes all public infrastructure including public toilets and change rooms, recreational spaces including public swimming pools, public buildings, footpaths, curbs and roads.

Participants felt public events need to be more inclusive particularly when planning for access. Sometimes erecting barriers to keep people safe often restricts access to people living with disability. Also in wet weather consider erecting a temporary pathway so people with mobility issues have good access to outdoor public events like the Autumn Festival and Australia Day celebrations.

Council needs to understand that uneven surfaces, overhanging braches and debris make it difficult for people living with disability to navigate around town.

There is also a need to provide more appropriate public seating. People with physical disabilities and the aged need accessible rest spots.

Access to Information

Council's communication and engagement practises were raised as being a critical factor to breaking down barriers to access and inclusion for the community.

Council needs to communicate information to people living with disability in varied forms. Not all people living with disability have access to a computer or can use a computer. Information needs to be accessible particularly around key infrastructure projects such as footpath and road maintenance.

Council needs to engage people living with disability in the design and implementation phase of such projects like public toilets and kerb ramps and event management.

Transport

A good accessible public transport system is extremely important for people living with disability to enable them to fully participate in community life.

Council needs to advocate strongly for a good accessible public transport system. At present there are concerns that the current system is not as good as it can be and is not affordable to some.

Accessible Parking

For people living with disability and their families and careers the availability of designated disabled parking spaces is a critical part of access to activities of daily life. Participants identified there is insufficient availability of designated parking spaces, and identified a contributing factor to this is people who don't have a disability and who don't display a disability parking permit often park in these spaces. Regulatory management of accessible parking spaces and permit systems was highlighted as an important role for Council.

Access Advisory Committee

Participants recognised that the Access Advisory Committee provides Council with strategic advice on access and inclusion and will oversee the delivery of the DIAP and that Council needs to continue to support this Committee.

6. DISABILITY INCLUSION ACTION PLANNING

The IP&R framework requires councils to draw their various plans together, to understand how they interact and to get the maximum leverage from their efforts by planning holistically for the future. Council plans and policies should not exist in isolation however should be connected and coordinated. Planning for inclusion and access needs to be considered as a core component of the IP&R framework.

Figure 1 : Relationship between the IP&R framework and Disability Inclusion Planning

7. MOVING FORWARD

The community engagement process has assisted Council in developing and revising the strategies and actions included in each focus area. The implementation of the actions will be delivered over the next 4 years. The Access Advisory Committee will monitor and review the DIAP as it progresses.

This Plan contains a mixture of aspirational and deliverable outcomes in support of a fully inclusive society for all. The determination of priorities, the allocation of responsibilities and the identification of the necessary resources are the next key steps in progressing this Plan.

Focus Area 1 – Attitudes and behaviours

Strategy	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
Lead a social reform agenda to enhance social integration of people living with disabilities and continue to remove barriers preventing them from fully participating in community life	Promote a set of corporate values which reflect social justice principles of equity, diversity and supportive environments. Ensure future public infrastructure projects and community services programs are based on social justice principles. In all promotions present an equitable and diverse community	A set of corporate values is developed based on social justice principles	Ongoing
		Develop a set of planning processes which include input from disability groups.	Ongoing
		Council committees have a membership which includes a person living with disability.	Ongoing
		Council committees have a diverse representation from the community.	Ongoing
		All Council advertising promotes diversity in our community.	
		Revised operating procedures.	Dec 2017
Increase staff awareness of disability issues in order to provide responsive services for customers with a disability.	Develop and implement frontline staff procedures to improve service delivery and complaints handling for people living with disability. Provide targeted disability training for frontline staff. Include Councillors and members of the Executive. Include disability awareness training in	A training program is developed and delivered as part of the annual Corporate Training Program.	Dec 2017
		Specialised training is delivered annually.	Dec 2017 and going
		Develop a specific module and include this as part of the staff induction package.	Ongoing

Strategy	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
	staff indications.		
Continue to support the Access Advisory Committee (AAC) and their advocacy role	Revise the terms of reference for the AAC to reflect the new Council Provide administration support to the committee and dedicate a Council officer to participate on the AAC and to follow up actions.	Community members from Guyra and Armidale are recruited into the AAC. The AAC meets bi-monthly and all minutes and relevant reports are sent to Council.	Ongoing
Create community awareness around the needs and issues facing people living with disability.	Hold an "adopt a disability" day. Invite Councillors and staff to participate.	An event is held every 2 years.	Bi-annually

Focus Area 2 – Liveable Communities

Strategy	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
Continuously Upgrade Council assets to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.	Scope out the revising of the Pedestrian and Mobility Plan (PAMP) for the new Council	A new PAMP is developed.	August 2018
	Monitor Council's "Assessment of Public Toilets under Council' Control" Plan.	Status reports are sent to the AAC.	Ongoing
	Scope out the work required to upgrade the Guyra HACC Centre to make it accessible.	A cost analysis is completed and considered for the 2018/2019 budget	August 2018
	Scope out the work required to upgrade the public toilets next to the post office in the Guyra main street.	A cost analysis is completed and considered for the 2018/2019 budget	June 2018
	Monitor and maintain tactile markings and increase connectivity where possible.	Tactile pathways are fully maintained and extended.	Ongoing
	Revise POL180 Street Trading Policy to cover Guyra CBD.	Policy is revised.	30 June 2018.
	To continue to update the existing database and send out notifications of current and future planned road works and footpath maintenance when requested	Footpath notification list is upgraded and notifications are sent out	December 2017
	Identify and prioritise public buildings that require access audits in accordance with AS1428.1 – Access to Premises standards.	An audit is completed and priority list developed.	Ongoing
	Ensure relevant staff receive up to date training in Disability - Access to Premises – Buildings Standards 2010	A training plan is in place.	Annually
	Ongoing feedback from our key stakeholders is critical to identifying areas for improvement in access. Ensure people with a disability have feedback into any concept design plans.	A section in the community engagement strategy identifies the need to consult with people living with disability.	Ongoing
	Scope out the work required to make the Monckton Aquatic		Ongoing

Strategy	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
	Centre and the Guyra swimming pool accessible.		
Ensure community programs and events are inclusive and accessible	Monitor and review the mobility map	An up to date mobility map.	Ongoing
	Develop a framework for public events which includes identifying access for people living with disability	A framework is developed and will form part of Council's Events Management Plan.	
	When developing community programs and events include feedback from people living with disability and local disability support groups.	A framework is developed.	Ongoing
	Celebrate International Day of People Living with Disability.	An annual event is held to celebrate.	Annually in December
	Continue to support the operations of the Kent House Community Centre and the Guyra HACC Centre.	These accessible facilities are available to the community.	Ongoing
Be a strong advocate for people living with disabilities	Promote accessible public events and sport and recreation programs.	Comms promotes programs and projects.	Ongoing
	Work with state and federal government agencies to improve outcomes for people living with disabilities in all areas of life including housing, education, employment and transport.	Increased participation in community life.	Ongoing
	Liaise with government departments to increase quota for designated disability parking bays especially in the Guyra Main Street.	Increased number of designated parking bays.	June 2018
	Continue to sponsor the Accessibility Award with the Armidale & Guyra Business Chambers	An Accessibility category is part of the annual business awards	Annually

Focus Area 3 – Employment

Strategy	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
Develop employment and volunteering opportunities for people living with disability.	Revise human resource management policies and procedures to ensure they are inclusive.	Revise policies and procedures.	Ongoing
	Develop a work experience / training program that can cater for people living with disability.	A program is developed.	Ongoing
	Work in partnership with local disability employment services and develop a program which supports their employment programs like Transition to Work.	An MOU is established with the Ascent Group.	Ongoing
	Continue to contract the services of local disability employment services.	Services are maintained.	Ongoing
	Review corporate volunteer policy to ensure Council's volunteering opportunities are accessible and inclusive.	Policy is revised.	Ongoing
	Council to provide staff resources to develop the DIAP.	Resourcing is provided.	July 2017
Audit Council's capacity to support a diverse workforce.	Engage regularly with staff who identify as having a disability to ensure their needs are being meet in the workplace.	Annually engage with staff and their supervisors.	Annually
	Promote flexible workplace practices.	State this in Council's job advertisements.	Ongoing

Focus Area 4 – Systems and Processes

Strategy	Action	Expected Outcome	Timeframe
Ensure accessible and inclusive community engagement.	Revise community engagement policy to improve access and participation in community consultations.	Increased participation in community engagements.	Ongoing
Ensure all promotions and the website is accessible.	Access to information is vital to full participation in community life. Ensure all Council promotions including brochures and flyers are available in a range of communication styles including Easy Read and audio.	Update Council's promotional materials. Update Council's website.	Ongoing
Promote a culture of responsive customer service.	Review Council's customer service processes to identify barriers to access and communication for people living with disability.	Training for customer service staff is completed.	December 2017
Continuously improve Council's processes to achieve better outcomes for people living with disability.	Develop and promote a series of publications explaining Council's processes including parking, footpath maintenance, development applications, Ranger services, waste management, water management and tourism.	A set of accessible publications are produced.	Ongoing

8. Monitor & Review

On completion Council's DIAP will go onto the NSW Disability Council website.

Each year Council will submit to the NSW Government an Annual Report on the progress of the DIAP including a summary of achievements.

The Access Advisory Committee (AAC) will have the DIAP as a permanent agenda item and Council will report to the AAC on progress and achievements.