

Disability Action Plan

Gunnedah Shire Council

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1. Council's statement

Gunnedah Shire Council is committed to providing all Gunnedah Shire residents and visitors, including those with a disability equal access to all its services, support and facilities and to the community resources of Gunnedah.

Council recognises its responsibility to meet the provisions of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1997 and to this end has resolved to prepare this Disability Action Plan within the NSW Government's Disability Policy Framework.

This plan sets out Council's priority actions to improve access and participation during the period 2002 to 2004. The achievement of these actions is also incorporated into Council's Management Plan. Associated performance measures will be included in the performance agreements of management staff.

Gae Swain
Mayor

MJ Kershaw
General Manager

25 July 2002

2. About Gunnedah Shire Council

This disability plan is consistent with Council's overall vision, mission and organisational values, which are:

Ψ **Vision:** To be a focussed community valuing Gunnedah's identity and quality lifestyle.

Ψ **Mission:** To promote, enhance and sustain the quality of life in Gunnedah Shire through balanced economic, environmental and social management in partnership with the people.

Ψ **Organisational values:**

- Equity
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Openness and accountability.
- Customer satisfaction
- Commitment to Safety

- Efficient & effective use of resources

Council provides services in the following areas:

- ψ corporate and client;
- ψ public order and safety;
- ψ health;
- ψ community services and education;
- ψ housing and community amenities;
- ψ recreational and cultural amenities;
- ψ mining, manufacture and construction;
- ψ transport and communications;
- ψ economic affairs;
- ψ water supply; and
- ψ sewerage.

The services within each of these broad categories are listed in Attachment A.

3. Council's disability responsibilities

Local Councils are required to comply with:

- ψ The **Local Government (General) Amendment (Community and Social Plans) Regulation 1998**. This requires Councils to:
 - ψ prepare a social / community plan
 - ψ consider the needs of people with a disability within their communities
 - ψ report about their planned & completed access & equity activities in their Annual reports and management plans.
- ψ The **NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977**.
 - ψ This Act outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, sex, marital status, **physical impairment, intellectual impairment**, homosexuality or age in employment, and in the provision of goods and services. Gunnedah Shire Council plans its implementation of the requirements of this act via its EEO Management Plan.
- ψ The **Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992**.
 - ψ This Act's objects are to:
 - ψ Make it unlawful to discriminate against people on the grounds of disability in:
 - ψ work, accommodation, education, access to premises, clubs and sport; and
 - ψ the provision of goods, facilities, services and land.
 - ψ Ensure that persons with disabilities have same rights to equality before the law as others;
 - ψ Promote community recognition and acceptance of the equal and fundamental rights of people with a disability.

(The definition of disability adopted by Council and a summary of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 are provided at Attachments **B** and **C** respectively.)

4. Council's commitment to people with disabilities

Gunnedah Shire Council, as a community leader, has a responsibility to initiate, deliver and promote services in the Shire that are of an agreed quality, and which are effective and accessible to all residents and visitors, including those with a disability.

Council, consistent with the NSW Government, has adopted the following principles and goal:

Principles:

- ψ People with disabilities are valued members of the community;
- ψ People with disabilities will have access to services provided to the general community;
- ψ In the provision of services to people with disabilities, the focus will be on the whole of life needs of individuals in their own communities;
- ψ Better outcomes for people with disabilities will result from cooperation among service providers, with the active participation of people with disabilities;
- ψ Services will support and be sensitive to the diversity of people with disabilities;
- ψ The unique needs of people with disabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background will be recognised;
- ψ The legal rights of people with disabilities will be recognised and protected.

Goal:

A society in which individuals with disabilities and their carers live as full citizens with optimum quality of life, independence and participation.

In particular, Council is committed to:

- ψ the equal participation, access, rights and equity principles of the Disability Discrimination Act and to acting accordingly;
- ψ ensuring that there is no disability discrimination in any of its own functions, services and programs;
- ψ promoting the equal rights and participation of people with a disability in the shire;
- ψ achieving an organisational culture which fosters fairness and equity and strives for continual improvement in the provision of works and services for all its residents and visitors, including those with a disability;
- ψ improving access to and usage of, Council's resources, services and facilities, and the community and its facilities;

Ψ removing barriers which exist to access and participation;

Ψ increasing the competence and confidence of its staff and others in meeting the needs of people with a disability.

In particular, Council aims to achieve the following **outcomes** in six areas:

- 1. Access:**
People with a disability have equitable access to Council's support, services and facilities, as well as to community facilities.
- 2. Positive community attitudes:**
Council promotes positive attitudes towards people with a disability.
- 3. Training:**
Council staff and other stakeholders, including Councillors, have appropriate knowledge and skills to deal effectively with people with a disability.
- 4. Information about services:**
All Council communications are accessible to people with disabilities and/or individual assistance is provided to interested people with communication disabilities.
- 5. Council employment:**
Council is an equal opportunity employer. People with a disability are provided with opportunities to gain Council employment, and are treated equitably when employed, including being provided with opportunities for career development.
- 6. Feedback and complaints:**
People with a disability can access Council's customer feedback processes.
- 7. Other priority areas:**
Council ensures that all of its policies, procedures and working arrangements are consistent with achieving its goal in relation to people with a disability.

Priority areas for Council action to achieve these outcomes are set out in this Plan. Resources are allocated to the Plan via Council's Management Plan. Employment specific plans are included in the Council's EEO Management Plan. Other social and community initiatives are set out in Council's Social / Community Plan.

The Plan recognises that people with disabilities are not an homogenous group. As well as diversity based on the nature of their disability, people with disabilities differ in terms of such aspects as gender, culture, language, religion, sexuality, geographic location and socio-economic circumstances.

5. Existing strategies and achievements

Gunnedah Shire Council outlines its broad directions and allocation of resources in its annual **Management Plan**. The broad directions outlined in the Management Plan are addressed in more detail in supplementary plans, such as youth needs analysis, community care business plan, cultural plan.

Council's **Social Community Plan 2000/2001** recommended that Council:

- continue to work with the Ageing and Disability Department, Department of Community Services and Service Providers in developing strategies for a more cohesive coordination of services, service delivery and service referral client groups;
- make provision in the 2000/2001 Management Plan to establish a Disability Action Plan for Gunnedah; and

Council has adopted an **Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan** to fulfil its responsibilities under the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act 1977. This plan incorporates the following objectives, within which are specific strategies with designated positions holding responsibility and with evaluation criteria:

1. COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS RAISING

1.1 To ensure all management and employees understand EEO principles, their responsibilities in relation to them, and the EEO Management Plan and its implementation.

1.2 To ensure that all personnel involved in EEO implementation have a sound understanding of EEO and are aware of their responsibilities under Council's EEO Management Plan.

2. CONSULTATION

2.1 To encourage the active participation of all employees, relevant unions and professional associations in decision making about the EEO Program.

3. PERSONNEL, POLICIES AND PRACTICES

3.1 RECRUITMENT, PROMOTION AND TRANSFER

3.1.1 To remove discriminatory terminology and language from all position information and ensure job co-ordination appraisal is non-discriminatory in content.

3.1.2 To ensure that the Merit Selection Panels encompass gender balance objectivity and skill levels, thus maintaining the principles of equal employment opportunities in the recruitment process.

3.1.3 To ensure that relevant Council premises and facilities are accessible to employees with physical disabilities.

3.1.4 To ensure that all appropriately qualified &/or skilled staff have equal employment opportunities to relieve/act at a higher grade.

3.1.5 To encourage the representation of staff from target groups in positions in which they are currently under-represented in Council.

3.2 TRAINING/DEVELOPMENT

3.2.1 To review Council's training/development plan to ensure conformation with EEO principles and to increase staff participation in formulating the training plan, with emphasis on EEO target groups.

3.3 HARASSMENT AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

3.3.1 To further develop promote and implement an accessible and effective grievance policy and procedure.

3.3.2 To ensure a discrimination and harassment-free workplace.

3.3.3 To provide an open, easy to understand process that facilitates and documents disputes, grievances and appeals providing a platform for resolution and natural justice.

4. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

4.1 To ensure successful implementation of the EEO Management Plan by the allocation of clear responsibilities and adequate resources.

5. PERSONNEL RECORDS MANAGEMENT

5.1 To ensure Council's Personnel Records Management system complies with EEO principles.

Further, on 21 November 2001, Council agreed to investigate making a percentage of future **traineeships** offered available to groups within Gunnedah that are traditionally under represented or disadvantaged when it comes to employment opportunities eg ATSI, Non English Speaking Backgrounds, people with disabilities and women. This action was seen to align well with the Council's EEO Management Plan.

Council recognises that with a stock of older public and private buildings, physical access could be improved and so has been working in a number of areas on improving access to both public and private infrastructure. Initiatives include:

- access has been upgraded to a number of Council buildings (eg to the ground floor of the Council administration building and to the library).
- any new commercial or industrial buildings, or major renovations to commercial or industrial buildings, are encouraged to incorporate access for people with a physical disability, required by minimum building access requirements.
- improved footpath access under its Central Business District improvement strategy.
- a survey of village halls has been conducted.

As well as Council's general services, which support all residents of the Shire, Council runs a number of community services which provide direct support to people with a disability:

Service	Method of Delivery	Target Group
Community Transport	Taxi, volunteer car, social transport, bus, medical, rural and isolated, Day Care, shopping	People with a disability and frail aged and CTO target groups and DVA
Volunteer Respite	Home visits, social support, appointments, payment of accounts	People with a disability and frail aged
Neighbour Aid	Minor home garden & lawn maintenance, wood delivery, shopping, mobile hairdressing, handyman	People with a disability and frail aged
Dementia Carer Support	Monthly care support group including social and information/ education support	Carers of people with Dementia
Commonwealth Carelink	Information for anyone on services available for older people, people with a disability, their families and carers Free call 18000520222 or visit shopfront	
Day Care	Centre based dementia Specific Day Care Program	People with a disability and frail aged with Dementia

GOCO Case Management + brokerage	Assessment, co-ordination, information advocacy Support, Counseling, social support, personal care meals and other food services, provision of goods and equipment, transport, counseling domestic assist, nursing and allied health care centre based day care, home maintenance and modification, linen service	People with a disability and frail aged with complex needs
Disability Support	holiday and recreational respite	People with a disability and frail aged
Commonwealth funded Dementia Respite	in home, out of home residential respite peer support	People with a disability and frail aged
Respite for Carers	in home, out of home residential respite peer support	People with a disability and frail aged
Community Aged Care Packages	Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Personal Care, Meals & other food services, Domestic Assistance, Respite, Transport , Advocacy, Care Coordination, Support, Medication assistance Minor home modification, Social Support	ACAT assessment, People with a disability and frail aged

6. Context and constraints

Council's annual operating expenditure in 2002/2003 is expected to be \$ 33,000,000. Council is restricted in its revenue raising capacity firstly through rate pegging and secondly through a reduction in the community's capacity to pay due to economic downturn.

There has been increasing demand on roads infrastructure whilst at the same time a reduction in roads grant funding.

Council has a high loan liability, which in the short term will restrict Councils discretionary expenditure.

Council has also experienced a reduction in funds on hand including restricted assets and Section 94 contributions. This outflow of cash makes each budget a very difficult exercise. Council also receives a number of un-funded mandates from the other tiers of Government, which places further stress on limited resources.

Another strain on Regional Communities such as Gunnedah stems from the national trend towards deregulation, as financial return on deregulated industry in rural areas does not justify retaining a presence. This reflects in downturn in the local economy. For example the banking industry, not only does withdrawal or a reduction of bank presence cause a direct impact but the company loses touch with the community and their *lending policies* often reflect this dislocation.

A significant number of the buildings in Gunnedah are old, with access for people with a disability either currently not available or extremely difficult. Cost and heritage requirements therefore affect access improvement strategies.

Access to various facilities within the Shire's villages is extremely limited, eg no villages have public pavements.

General demographics:

- The Shire had an estimated population in 2000 of 12480¹ spread over 5,021 square kilometres. This was a population density of 2.4 people per square kilometre. Approximately 75% of the Shire's population live in Gunnedah or Curlewis.
- Gunnedah's population was expected to decline by 773 people or 5.8% between 1995 and 2000²

In 1996:

- Gunnedah Shire's median individual income was \$245 weekly, compared to \$297 in NSW and \$292 in Australia as a whole.
- Gunnedah's median household income was \$515 weekly, compared to \$653 in NSW and \$635 in Australia as a whole.
- 999, or 7.8%, of its residents identified as of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent (compared to 1.7% of NSW's population and 1.8% of Australia's).
- 193, or 1.5%, of its residents aged 5 years and over spoke a language other than English (compared to 16.8% of NSW's population and 13.9% of Australia's).
- Gunnedah's unemployment rate as a percentage of the labour-force was 9.9% compared to NSW's of 8.8% and Australia's of 9.2%.
- Gunnedah's median age of 34 with an average household size of 2.7 were the same as the averages for NSW and Australia.
- 73% of its employees were private sector employees, 11% were State Government and 8% were local government.
- 22% of its workforce is employed in wholesale and retail trade industries, 19% in agriculture and forestry, 11% in manufacturing and 10% in public administration.

7. Profile of Gunnedah Community and staff

In NSW and Australia, the proportion of people who have a disability is 19.3% (ABS 1998 *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings #4430.0*).

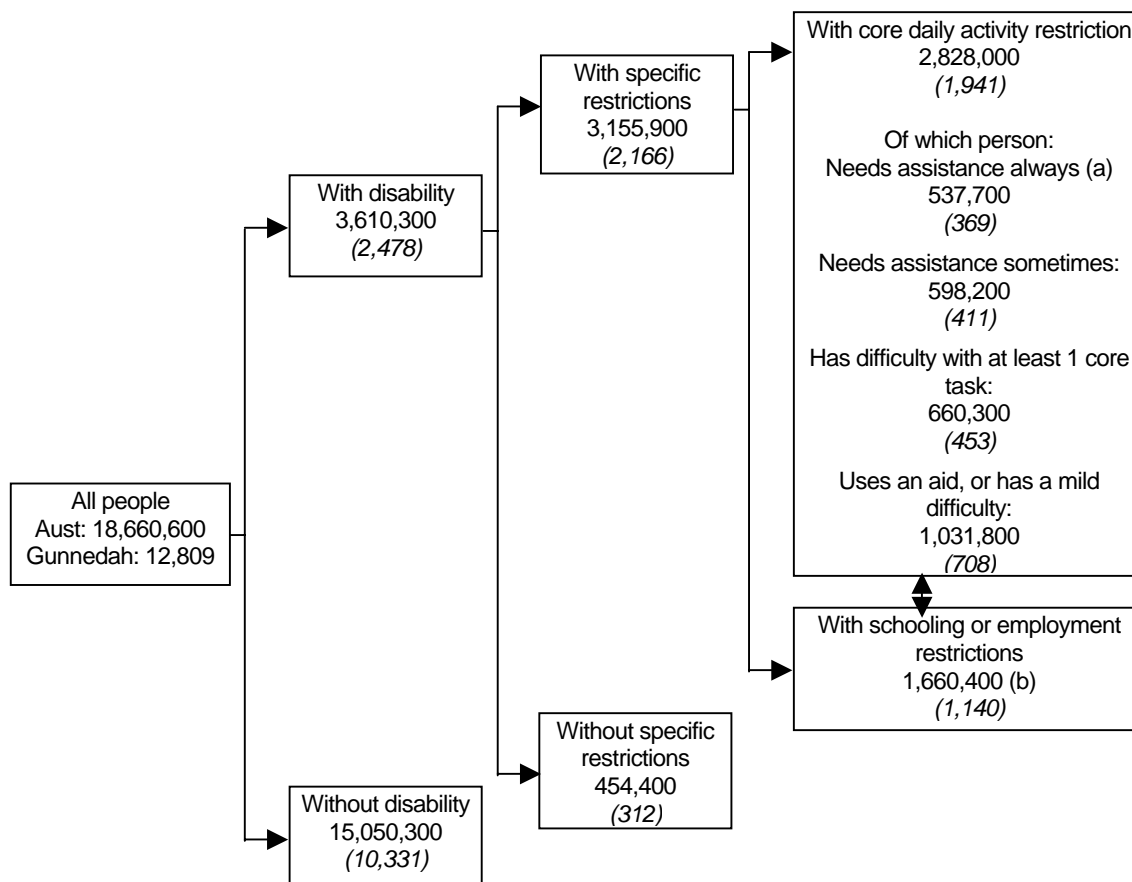
Data about the extent to which the disability results in an activity restriction, requiring the assistance of others, in one or more of core areas of mobility, self care or communication, is available for the Australian population only. The following diagram shows this Australian information.

The total population of Gunnedah is shown below the total population figure. The possible numbers of people in Gunnedah with the range of disability types is shown in brackets and italicised. It is stressed that these figures estimate the possible incidence only as they are estimated by applying the Australian incidence to Gunnedah's population. No information is available about whether local regions vary greatly from this national incidence.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth 1999-2000*. 3218.0

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Regional Population Growth 1999-2000*. 3218.0

Diagram 1 Australians with Disability in 1998, (with possible Gunnedah incidence bracketed)



- (a) The Australian Bureau of Statistics uses the terms profound, severe, moderate and mild to describe a person's handicap. A person with a profound handicap always needs personal help or supervision with a core task; a person with a severe handicap sometimes needs personal help or supervision with a restriction in a core activity. Moderate means that no personal help or supervision is required, but the person has difficulty in performing a core task. Mild means that a person has no difficulty performing a task but uses an aid or has a mild mobility handicap or cannot easily pick up an object from the floor.
- (b) Includes 1 332 500 people with core activity restrictions in Australia (1 140 in Gunnedah)

Diagram 1 suggests that there **could** be some two and a half thousand Gunnedah residents with a disability, of whom just over two thousand are restricted in a core activity of daily life, of whom perhaps in the order of 370 **always** need assistance with their core restriction. Perhaps just over one thousand are restricted in schooling or employment.

Gunnedah had 1,696 people aged 65 and over in 1996. This represented 13.2% of its population (compared to the 65 and over population forming 12.4% of New England's and 12.6% of NSW's populations). This population is expected to grow by 255 by 2006, when it will form 15.6% of Gunnedah's population compared to 14.9% and 13.4% in New England and in NSW.

5 of the 59 respondents to Council's Disability Survey, conducted to support the preparation of this plan, identified themselves as having a disability (four physical and one hearing).

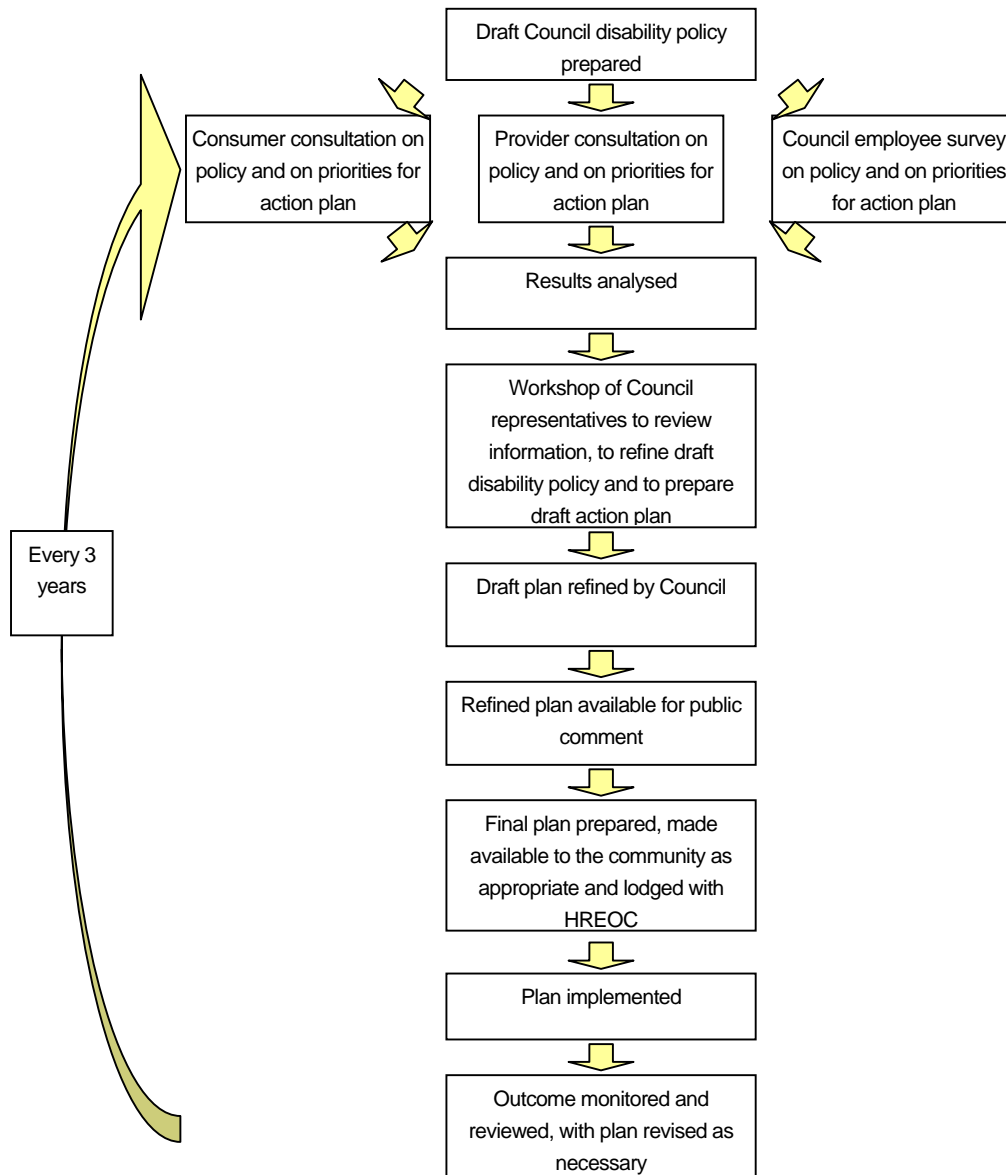
8. Development of this plan

This plan was developed by Council's Community Services Manager with assistance from staff, service providers, people with a disability and Dianne Beatty of Alt Beatty Consulting. The process used to develop the plan is outlined in Diagram 2 on the following page.

Significant events in this process included:

- ψ The consumer and community consultation held at 10.30 am on Tuesday 27 November 2001. 13 families were invited and 3 were represented. An exit form was offered (see Attachment **D**) to ensure that all participants were able to offer all of their comments and suggestions. However no participant chose to complete this form, with all saying they had an opportunity to voice their concerns. A summary of the comments from this consultation are attached at **E**.
- ψ The service provider and local government consultation held at 1.30 pm on Tuesday 27 November 2001. 69 people were invited and 19 attended with 2 others providing written or phone comments. The same exit form as provided at Attachment C was also offered for this consultation. Again, no-one opted to complete the form. A summary of the provider comments are attached at **F**.
- ψ The staff survey conducted between early January and 6 February 2002. Surveys were given to the 170 employees receiving paypackets in early January. (Council employs 184 people.) 59 responses were received. (The survey is attached at **G**, with results summarised at **H**.)
- ψ The workshop of Council representatives held on 1 March 2002. 12 Council employees participated. The exit form was again offered with two responses reinforcing the need for recommended actions to be achievable, costed, prioritised, incorporated into Council's Management Plan and then action and progress audited.
- ψ The draft plan was circulated for public comment between 17 October 2002 and 15 November 2002 comments were received and incorporated, as appropriate, into the final plan.
- ψ The Plan was endorsed by Council on August 2002 and February 2003 and lodged with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Diagram 2: Process to develop Disability Action Plan



9. Communicating the plan

A hard copy of this plan, without attachments, will be provided to all Council staff. A full copy, with attachments, will be provided to all Senior Managers and Managers. The complete plan will be posted on the Council's intranet site.

A complete plan will also be provided to Gunnedah's SCAN (Service Coordination Advocacy Network) group, which is a group of disability service providers, who have accepted responsibility to advise Council on community equity and access issues.

The Plan will be able to be downloaded from the Council's web site. The site will also note that:

- ψ interested people can request a hard copy directly from Council;
- ψ vision impaired people who would prefer a large copy version or a version of Section 3 in non-tabular form can request this from the Community Services Manager
- ψ comments and questions should be directed to the Community Services Manager

10. Implementing the plan

Responsibility for implementing the Disability Action Plan rests with Council staff, in co-operation as necessary with the community. The Plan will be linked annually to Council's Management Planning process, hence ensuring integration of the recommended strategies into Council's core business and allowing for allocation of adequate resources.

Council will delegate the responsibility of monitoring and co-ordinating the implementation of the Action Plan to two committees:

- The EEO Committee: will be responsible for facilitating and monitoring the strategies that relate directly to staff and Council facilities.
- The Community Services Committee will be responsible for facilitating and monitoring the strategies related to community development and partnerships between Council and the community.

11. Monitoring and evaluation

Ongoing monitoring to ensure implementation of the strategies included in the Plan will be the responsibility of designated managers and will be checked via quarterly reviews of the management plan objectives. Achievement of Management Plan objectives form a major part of each managers' performance appraisal. The plan itself will undergo annual audits of progress through the Committees responsible.

Annual audits will include consideration of:

- ψ implementation progress;
- ψ implementation barriers;
- ψ stakeholder views about progress, including the views of Council's Community Services Committee and of Gunnedah's SCAN group;
- ψ required improvements / modifications to the Plan.

The first audit will be conducted during the first quarter of 2003. A progress report will be provided to the Mayor and General Manager by 30 June each year. A summary of progress will be included in Council's Annual Report.

12. Preparing a new Plan

A new Plan will be prepared every three years, the next being for 2005-2007.

Strategies

Note:

1. A non-tabular version of Section 3 can be requested from the Community Services Manager.
2. The implementation of these strategies will take into account that people with disabilities are not an homogenous group. As well as diversity based on the nature of their disability, people with disabilities differ in terms of such aspects as gender, culture, language, religion, sexuality, geographic location and socio-economic circumstances.

1. Access

Outcome 1: People with a disability have equitable access to Council's support, services and facilities, as well as to community facilities.**Achievements to date:**

- ψ Enhancement of physical accessibility of key Council buildings (eg downstairs of main Council building, the Civic, the Global Information Centre (library).
- ψ Incorporation of accessibility into all new public or business buildings, including those being re-zoned for a change of use (eg Oxley Pathology building).
- ψ Incorporation of increased accessibility into buildings being used by some public authorities (eg ramps for Australia Post shop)
- ψ Survey of Village Halls.

Identified barriers:

- ψ Many public and Council buildings and businesses still remain inaccessible (eg Medicare, Smithhurst Theatre, Town Hall)
- ψ Inadequate or poorly designed footpath dishes, ramps, accessible toilets, scooter access over the railway line.
- ψ Some of the restrictions to access are an ongoing problem, although are not related to the physical design of buildings (eg tree and shrub branches overhanging pavements; pot-plants, signage and other displays on the pavements outside business houses in the Central Business District).

Performance indicators:

- ψ All Council action and development plans will include consideration of the needs of people with a disability and actions required to address priority issues for them, by June 2003.
- ψ An access audit team including Council staff, representatives of Gunnedah's SCAN group and consumer representatives, including people with mobility difficulties, will be established by November 2002.
- ψ An access audit of Council facilities and infrastructure, identifying all physical access barriers, will have been conducted by April 2003.
- ψ Priority actions from this access audit will be incorporated into this Disability Action Plan, with resources allocated to priorities under Council's Management Plan process.
- ψ An access audit of community and public facilities will be conducted by April 2004. Priority areas for further action will be incorporated into this Plan by June 2004.

Strategies	Officer responsible	Timeframe
1. Council will consider the needs of people with a disability in all its development plans (including its Local Environment Plan, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan, Cultural Precinct Plan, Youth Plan, Central Business District and Hall Plan, Community Care Business Plan, Village Hall Plan).	All managers	By June 2003
1.1: An access audit team including Council staff, representatives of Gunnedah's SCAN group and consumer representatives (including those who use wheelchairs and/or scooters and those with visual impairments), will be established.	MCS/EEO committee	By December 2002
1.2: Training will be provided to participants of this audit team (covering at least disability access issues and strategic planning and possibility a visit to another community, possibly Tamworth or Armidale, with previous experience of such access audits).	MCS/MHR	By February 2003
1.3: Guidelines to guide the work of this access audit team will be developed and agreed.	EEO Committee MCS	December 2002
1.4: The access audit team will audit Council's facilities and infrastructure.	M E S, ME&D, MCS	By April 2003
1.5: Priority areas for action to upgrade the physical accessibility of Council's facilities and infrastructure will be agreed by Council in collaboration with its access audit team. This work will consider suggestions made in consultations and in the staff survey reported in this Plan (Attachments E and G).	Rept to MANEX Rec. to Council 15 year plan	By May 2003
1.6: Priority areas for action in relation to improving access to Council buildings and facilities will be incorporated into Council's Disability Action Plan, with appropriate resources allocated via Council's Management Plan.	All managers	By June 2003
1.7: Council will work with other community and public facilities and business houses to promote, as appropriate, priority actions to upgrade their physical accessibility. This may include an access audit or an access awards system (in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce, the SCAN group and with consumer representatives, including those who use wheelchairs and/or scooters and those with visual impairments). This work will consider suggestions made in consultations and in the staff survey reported in this Plan (Attachments E and G).	MT&ED (Business Gunnedah)	By April 2004
1.8: Priority actions arising from the community and public facilities activities will be incorporated into this Action Plan, with Council's resource contribution to priority actions allocated in Council's Management Plan.	MCS MED Facilities Plan	By June 2004
1.9: Production of booklet detailing disability accessible facilities including business, accommodation and Council facilities.	ME&D, MTED, MCS	By June 2004

2. Positive community attitudes

Outcome 2: Council promotes positive attitudes towards people with a disability.

Achievements to date:

- Ψ Council sponsors and supports a number of community services, including a number specifically for people with a disability, aged people and their carers.
- Ψ Gunnedah Shire Council has developed a website, which is being further expanded to include key Council information and documents.
- Ψ Local newspaper was seen to be very supportive of community and Council's regular page in the local paper is viewed positively.
- Ψ Council's swimming pool staff were reported as positively and happily support people with physical disabilities to access the pool.
- Ψ Council has positively supported and promoted Gunnedah Shelter Workshop's waste management and recycling service.
- Ψ Gunnedah Shire Council provides accessible meeting areas for community meetings and activities.

Identified barriers:

Ψ

Performance indicators:

- Ψ Council will have promoted the adoption of this Disability Action Plan throughout the community and in its newspaper column in 2002.
- Ψ Council will have publicised activities and achievements under this Action Plan throughout the period 2002-2005.

Strategies	Officer responsible	Timeframe
2.1: Council will work collaboratively with community groups and members to promote positive attitudes to people with a disability. This could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • positive but "not overdone" promotion or inclusion of people with a disability in Council publications; • publicising activities and achievements under this Disability Action Plan via Council's website and newspaper page and at special activities such as AgQuip, the annual Agricultural Show; • any new Council publications with photographs of residents including positive images of people with a disability and other residents from disadvantaged groups; • consideration of the use of a call waiting message system on Council phones, to promote key initiatives, achievements and actions of Council, including those for people with a disability; and • consideration of strategies used by other Councils to promote positive access, participation and 	MT&ED MANEX ME&D	2002-2005

promotion (eg Sydney City Council's introduction of Braille signage).		
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3. Training

Outcome 3: Council staff and other stakeholders have appropriate knowledge and skills to deal effectively with people with a disability.

Achievements to date:

- ψ Consumers who participated in the consultations leading to this plan reported that Council staff treated people with a disability courteously and were not aware of any difficulties with the behaviour or attitude of Council staff in relation to people with a disability.

Identified barriers:

- ψ Some staff may limit their vision about what could be achieved because they thought that resources would be inadequate to find a solution to problems. It was argued that it was necessary to raise staff and others' awareness of what Council can actually achieve.
- ψ Concern was also expressed that access was an afterthought to design, rather than an integral first element of design.
- ψ 20% of employees who responded to the disability access survey thought their understanding of access issues could be improved. A number of respondents identified barriers to people with a disability accessing Council services and facilities, including staff verbal communication difficulties, staff skill or confidence in working with people with a disability and the attitudes of Council staff. 41 or 69% of respondents felt they needed training in at least one area relating to supporting people with a disability. They were in order of frequency: Council's responsibilities, access issues, disability awareness, access for people with a disability from non-English speaking backgrounds, equipment and access issues for people with a disability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent.

Performance indicators:

- ψ Representatives of all Council work areas will have received disability awareness, responsibilities and skills training during 2002-2003, 2003-2004 based on a priority basis
- ψ An overview of Council's responsibilities in relation to people with a disability and basic communication skills training will be incorporated into all Council orientation from 2002-2003. This overview will recognise the different backgrounds, culture and needs of people with a disability.
- ψ An information session will be conducted for representatives of all Council work areas about the range of services available in Gunnedah and the region for people with a disability and other disadvantaged groups, by December 2002.
- ψ In 2002-2003 Council will have offered any spare places in these training sessions to people from other community and business groups, including community representatives on Council's access audit team.

Strategies	Officer responsible	Timeframe
3.1: Representatives of all Council work areas will attend disability awareness, responsibilities and skills training through Council's Horizon Training Centre during 2002-2003 & 2003-2004. Councillors will also be invited to attend these sessions.	Training plan MHR	By June 2003
3.2: Councillors will be provided clear information about Council's disability responsibilities and about the role, content and impact of this plan, prior to consideration of its adoption.	MCS	August 2002
3.3: An overview of Council's responsibilities in relation to people with a disability and basic communication skills training will be incorporated into all Council orientation from 2002-2003. This overview will recognise the different backgrounds, culture and needs of people with a disability.	MHR	By June 2003
3.4: An information session will be conducted for representatives of all Council work areas about the range of services available in Gunnedah and the region for people with a disability and other disadvantaged groups. This information session may use the information being compiled for action 4.5 below.	MCS MHR	By April 2003
3.5: In 2002-2003 Council will have offered any spare places in these training sessions to people from other community and business groups, including community representatives on Council's access audit team.	MCS MHR	Ongoing
3.6: See also action 1.3		

4. Information about services

Outcome 4: All Council communications are accessible to people with disabilities and/or individual assistance is provided to interested people with communication disabilities.

Achievements to date:

- ψ Library now has some large print books, a special computer and desk for people with visual impairments.
- ψ Gunnedah Community Transport has just produced a new pamphlet on its service, which has been distributed to all households in the Gunnedah Shire, highlighting its support for any people with a transport disadvantage.
- ψ Gunnedah Special Support Service has also produced and distributed a new pamphlet.

Identified barriers:

- ψ Gunnedah has no Telephone Typewriter facility.

Performance indicators:

counter staff) about the services available to people with a disability both from Council and from other Gunnedah and regional agencies. This strategy may involve the use of a directory with symbols, the involvement of Carelink and/or the use of an on-line, intranet hyper-linked system. Where possible other interested agencies will be informed or involved (for example, the State Emergency Services, schools, TAFE, etc).	MHR MCS	
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5. Council employment

Outcome 5: Council is an equal opportunity employer. People with a disability are provided with opportunities to gain Council employment, and are treated equitably when employed, including being provided with opportunities for career development.

Achievements to date:

- ψ Council has an Equal Employment Opportunity Plan and sub-committee and has recently endorsed increased usage of traineeships for people from historically disadvantaged groups.
- ψ Council offers literacy support and training for employees with literacy difficulties.
- ψ Council employs at least 5 employees who identified themselves in the staff disability survey as having a disability. None of these said they had encountered barriers to their employment at Council.

Identified barriers:

- ψ Some informal barriers to employment of people with a disability remain.
- ψ No information is known about discouraged employment seekers.

Performance indicators:

- ψ Council will by June 2003 be able to show improvements in its human resources and training strategies specifically targeting the needs of current and potential employees with a disability.

Strategies	Officer responsible	Timeframe
Council will ensure that its Equal Employment Management Plan reflects the unique needs of people with disabilities and incorporates appropriate measures to meet its legislative and other employment related responsibilities.	MHR EEO C'tee	From 2002
Council will assist local agencies in their endeavours to enhance employment opportunities for people with a disability (for example by offering any spare training places to community members).	C.R MCS, MHR,	From 2002

Council will adopt a policy of “reasonable adjustment” in workplace practices, including providing equipment for individual staff members with a physical disability to assist them to perform their duties.	EEO Committee	December 2002
Council will explore opportunities to employ people with a disability supported via open employment support services.	MHR, EEO C'tee	By June 2003
Council will explore ways of promoting access to its positions by reviewing ways it can improve its recruitment processes. This will identify and attempt to remove both formal and informal barriers to employment of people with a disability. This will also consider the level of affirmative action Council wishes to adopt.	MHR	By June 2003

6. Feedback and Complaints

Outcome 6: People with a disability can access Council's customer feedback processes.

Achievements to date:

- ψ Participants were not aware of any significant concerns about Council's performance in relation to people with a disability. Although all recognised access barriers (particularly physical).

Identified barriers:

- ψ Some concern was expressed that some staff and residents were negative about Council's ability or willingness to improve physical access.

Performance indicators:

- ψ All new or revised major documents of Council (either published in hardcopy or on the net) will by June 2003 encourage feedback on Council performance, explain how feedback can be given and will be written in plain English.
- ψ Council will, by December 2003, have documented agreed working arrangements with the SCAN/ consumer disability access group about consultation, advice and feedback.

Strategies	Officer responsible	Timeframe
6.1 Council will ensure that all public information outlining its feedback and complaints system is written in plain English and that information about this system is posted on its website.	Assess EEO C'tte	June 2003
6.2 Council will use the SCAN / consumer disability access group for consultation about suggestions to alter the Disability Action Plan's priorities or to incorporate new suggestions from the community about priority actions for Council, in the development of its Management Plan. Where appropriate and agreed by parties in dispute, this group may also be used to find options for	MCS EEO committee	From December 2003

resolution of disputes about matters relating to people with a disability or their access and participation. The SCAN / consumer disability access group will also be encouraged to bring to Council concerns, suggestions and issues, as they arise.		
6.3 Working arrangements about consultation, feedback and advice between Council and the SCAN / consumer disability access group will have been agreed and documented.	MCS	December 2003

7 Other priority areas

Outcome 7: Council ensures that all its policies, procedures and working arrangements are consistent with achieving its goal in relation to people with a disability.

Achievements to date:

- ψ Council has policies, procedures and consultation arrangements, which broadly aim to achieve equity of treatment for all residents and visitors to Gunnedah Shire.

Identified barriers:

- ψ Policies, procedures and consultation arrangements in relation to people with a disability and their carers could be enhanced.

Performance indicators:

ψ By June 2004, all of Councils policies, procedures and working and consultation arrangements will have been reviewed, considering ways to optimise achievement of Council's goal in relation to people with a disability. In key areas, this review will have involved input from people with a disability.

Strategies	Officer responsible	Timeframe
7.1 Council will seek the assistance of its access audit team and Gunnedah's SCAN group in order to design and implement strategies to improve consumer input into its annual audits of this Plan.	EEO C'tee MCS	By February 2003
7.2 Council will use other strategies (than a survey) to seek the input of outdoor staff in the development of this Action Plan possibly via staff meetings.	EEO C'tee M Jones	By February 2003
7.3 In its regular review and amendment of its policies, procedures and guidelines, Council will ensure that they are designed to afford people with a disability (and other groups with disadvantage) equal access to its support, services and facilities, and equal participation in the Gunnedah Shire community. Council will involve people with a disability in review of key parts of these policies and procedures.	EEO C'tee MANEX	Ongoing
7.4 Council will consider ways of promoting the accessibility of its policies and procedures, including consideration of a hyper linked, intranet version.	MANEX	June 2004
7.5 The role of the Disability representative on Council's Community Services Committee will include regular liaison with disability service providers and consumers about development issues and needs, and to communicate priority concerns and issues to this committee.	MCS	December 2002
7.6 The role of Gunnedah's SCAN committee will be extended to include provision of access and equity advice to Gunnedah Shire Council. For this role, additional consumer representatives (including those who use wheelchairs and/or scooters and those with a visual impairment) will be recruited to this group.		See earlier actions, particularly 6.2 & 6.3

Attachments

A: List of Council services.

Principal Activity	Service To Be Provided
Corporate & client	Corporate Services Governance Administration Services Financial Services Client Services Information Technology Tendering, Contract Management Human Resources Services Training
Public Order & Safety	Emergency Services Bushfire Services Animal Control and Regulation
Health	Food Premises Inspection Services Vermin Inspection and Control Services Immunisations Services litter Control Water Sampling Noxious Plants Inspection & Destruction
Community services & Education	Aged Persons Support Services Day Care Centre Community Health Centre Community Transport Services Gunnedah/Oxley Community Options Home and Community Care Support Disability Services Youth Care Services Naturalisations
Housing & community amenities	Public Housing Council Housing Strategic Planning Town Planning Services Social Planning Services Household Waste Management Services Street and Gutter Cleaning Services Stormwater Drainage Public Toilets Cemeteries

Environmental Protection

Continued over page.....

Principal Activity

Service To Be Provided

Recreation & Cultural Amenities

Library Services
Museum Maintenance
Spotting Complexes
Australia Day & Community Festivals
Dorothea Mackellar Festival
Week of Speed Festival
Creative Arts Centre
Gunnedah Shire Band
Swimming Pools
Indoor Sporting Centres
Public Parks, Gardens & Reserves
Riverside Racecourse
Public Halls, The Civic

Mining, Manufacture & Construction

Building Control Services
Quarries and Gravel Pits

Transport & Communications

Town Streets Pavements, Kerb & Gutters
Town Streets Footpaving, Tree Planting & Street Furniture
Rural Roads
Signposting and Traffic Facilities
Bridges and Culverts
Aerodrome
Car Parking
Bus Shelters and Street Seats

Economic Affairs

Tourism Promotion and Development
Industrial and Commercial
Economic Development
Tidy Towns Promotion
Saleyards
Shop and Office Leasing
Land Development
Property Management
Private Works

Water supply

Water Supplies to Gunnedah, Curlewis, Mullaley & Tambar Springs

Sewerage

Sewerage Services to Gunnedah & Curlewis

B: Definition of disability

"In the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) "disability", in relation to a person, means:

- (a) total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or
- (b) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- (c) the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or
- (d) the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or
- (e) the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or
- (f) a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or
- (g) a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;

and includes a disability that:

- (h) presently exists; or
- (i) previously existed but no longer exists; or
- (j) may exist in the future; or
- (k) is imputed to a person.

It should be noted that this definition does not attempt to place some people with a disability outside its coverage by virtue of the perceived minimal effect of some disabilities. This definition seeks to include all people with a disability, regardless of the severity of the disability or the extent of its effect."¹

¹ Extract from the Department of Local Government – Disability Action Plan, developed by Moxon, Green and Associates Pty Ltd, November 2000.

C: Disability Discrimination Act - summary

“...the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) ... makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with a disability in a number of areas. A brief description of the DDA follows. It must be clearly understood that this brief description is meant to be general information and is not offered as legal advice. A solicitor should be consulted if it is believed that discrimination has occurred or is occurring or may occur. Agencies that might also be able to assist include the Anti-Discrimination Board, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, and the Disability Discrimination Legal Centre.

Objects of the DDA

The objects of the DDA are:

- (a) to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the areas of:
 - (i) work, accommodation, education, access to premises, clubs and sport; and
 - (ii) the provision of goods, facilities, services and land; and
 - (iii) existing laws; and
 - (iv) the administration of Commonwealth laws and programs; and
- (b) to ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community; and
- (c) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community.

Types of discrimination

The DDA refers to two types of discrimination: direct and indirect.

Under the DDA a person would be directly discriminating against a person with a disability if that person is treated less favourably because of their disability than another person who does not have a disability where the circumstances are the same or not materially different. If the person with a disability requires different accommodation or services because of their disability, this is not deemed to be materially different circumstances.

Examples of direct discrimination can include:

- Refusing a person with a disability a job because they have a disability,

- Refusing to serve a person with a disability in a shop because they have a disability,
- Refusing to allow a person into a restaurant because they use a wheelchair, *
Refusing to allow a blind person into a taxi or on to a bus with a guide dog.

Indirect discrimination occurs when a person with a disability is required to comply with a requirement that can be complied with by a substantially higher proportion of people without the disability, the requirement is not reasonable in the particular case, and the person with a disability is unable to comply with it. This means that "treating everyone the same" may be discriminatory.

Examples of indirect discrimination can include:

- Requiring all job applicants to complete a handwritten job application (unfair to someone whose disability affects their handwriting),
- Requiring all customers to enter a store through a turnstile (unfair to someone who uses a wheelchair),
- Requiring all employees to have a driver's licence. Unless driving is an inherent requirement of all jobs this would be unfair to someone who is unable to pass a driving test due to a disability (such as vision impairment or epilepsy) and whose job does not involve driving as an inherent requirement.

Unjustifiable hardship

The DDA does not make it unlawful to discriminate against a person with a disability if the action required to prevent or eliminate the discrimination would cause the discriminator "unjustifiable hardship".

Unjustifiable hardship is not defined in the DDA but section 11 of the Act does state that in determining whether unjustifiable hardship exists, all relevant circumstances of the particular case are to be taken into account including:

- (a) the nature of the benefit or detriment likely to accrue or be suffered by any persons concerned. And
- (b) the effect of the disability of a person concerned; and
- (c) the financial circumstances and the estimated amount of expenditure required to be made by the person claiming unjustifiable hardship; and
- (d) in the case of the provision of services, or the making available of facilities, an action plan given to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission under section 64 of the DDA.

Complaints

If a person with a disability believes that unlawful discrimination has occurred or is going to occur, a complaint can be lodged under the DDA with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). It is also possible for complaints to be lodged with the Anti-Discrimination Board under the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act.

If the complaint is lodged with HREOC, it will write to the person or organisation complained against and seek an explanation. If required, HREOC will then attempt to settle the complaint by conciliation in a meeting between the person making the complaint and the person or organisation complained against.

Where conciliation is not successful, HREOC will terminate the complaint and it is then necessary to lodge an application for the complaint to be heard in the Federal Court. The Federal Court can order the discrimination to cease and can award damages to a complainant. Legal advice should always be sought before proceeding to the Federal Court.”²

² Extract from the Department of Local Government – Disability Action Plan, developed by Moxon, Green and Associates Pty Ltd, November 2000.

E: Summary - Consumer, Council and provider comments

1. Physical access:

Achievements:

- Enhancements to the downstairs area of Council's main building to enhance physical access
- Library (The Global Information Centre) is now wheelchair accessible
- A new ramp has been installed at the PO.
- New Civic Cinema is accessible.
- Council has adopted the Building Code of Australia which means that all new public or business buildings or buildings seeking a change of usage to a business must meet this code which improves access.
- Range of community buildings' access has been upgraded, including that of the Services Club, the Stones Way Restaurant, Oxley Pathology, Homes North office, Montorey Café.
- Most of Gunnedah's motels have at least one physically accessible room
- Council's Central Business District Improvement Plan in concentrating initially on improving access to the mainstreet from off street carparks.
- Council has adopted the new Australian Standard for gutter crossings and pedestrian ramps, which includes special design features to promote visual assistance.
- Council's swimming pool has assistance for people with a disability.
- Council is currently applying with Homes North West to build new accessible housing units in Meldrum Street.
- Gunnedah Community Transport, sponsored by Gunnedah Shire Council, has a wheelchair accessible bus which provides services throughout the Shire, including trips to Gunnedah and Tamworth central business districts from outlying areas. The service is currently preparing a 5 year plan aimed at improving its support of people with a transport disadvantage.

Remaining barriers & issues:

- Upstairs area of Council's main building remains inaccessible to people with mobility disabilities.
- Inadequate transport from and in outlying areas
- No disabled taxi
- Difficulties re access to older buildings in Gunnedah (eg Medicare office, Commonwealth bank could not get up onto the pavement from car parking space)
- Many dishes on pavements too steep for scooters and wheelchairs
- Absence or inadequate numbers of dishes in residential areas
- Uneven pavements make it difficult for people with mobility difficulties or in chairs or who use scooters
- Inadequate number of designated disabled carparks in the central business district and near key buildings (eg the new Civic Theatre, the Global Information Centre, near the Physiotherapy department at the Hospital, at TAFE, near doctors and dentists)
- Access to cinema for people with a disability impeded by the locking of one gate.
- Inadequate size of some disabled carparks (eg at the Hospital and at Community Health)

- Many ramps to key Council buildings and other facilities are either too steep or have lips or these buildings have other access difficulties (eg at the Smithhurst Theatre, the Town Hall, the Creative Arts Centre, the Engineering Section, the doors of the Physiotherapy unit of the Hospital)
- Internal organisation of Global Centre prevents access to internet resources and to some resources (due to heights of shelves)
- Very few adequately designed and sized wheelchair accessible public toilets. Difficulties with those available are the size of the McDonald's toilet and doors leading to it, plus hygiene standard of the toilet in Wolseley Park.
- Meeting the minimum standards required for physical accessibility, sometimes is inadequate to achieve good physical accessibility.
- Walkway near Homes North is inadequate although this has been identified for improvement in Council's Central Business District plan.
- Transport disadvantage for outlying residents remain particularly for Breeza, Curlewis and Carroll.

Suggestions:

- An information session be organised with the RTA to provide advice to users about the regulations regarding use of motorised scooters.
- An access audit, conducted collaboratively between Council, Chamber of Commerce, the Gunnedah SCAN³ group, consumers (including those who use wheelchairs and scooters and preferably a person with a vision impairment) and other interested groups or people.
- Need for assistance to hold bus doors open for people with a mobility disability and for bus restraints.
- Produce a map or brochure showing designated parking spaces for people with a disability and wheelchair accessible public toilets.
- Need for clearer access on footpaths in the Central Business District (limiting shop racks, shelves and other displays on footpaths)
- Produce a window sticker to give to businesses that are "wheelchair friendly".
- Need to improve Council and other staff's understanding of availability of, and eligibility for, existing support services (eg transport) to promote their use.

2. Positive community attitudes:

Achievements:

- Council sponsors and supports a number of community services, including a number specifically for people with a disability, aged people and their carers.
- Gunnedah Shire Council has developed a website, which is being further expanded to include key Council information and documents.
- Council's regular page in the local paper was viewed positively.
- Council's swimming pool staff were reported as positively and willingly supporting people with physical disabilities to access the pool.
- Council has positively supported and promoted Gunnedah Shelter Workshop's waste management and recycling service.
- Gunnedah Shire Council provides accessible meeting areas for community meetings and activities.

Remaining barriers & issues:

Suggestions:

- Positive but "not overdone" promotion or inclusion of people with a disability in Council publications.
- Council could increase the design and use of its Annual Report as a promotional tool.

³ The Gunnedah SCAN (Service Coordination and Advocacy Network) group is a group of providers of support to people with a disability who meet monthly to discuss issues of concern and to plan support for consumers.

- Any new Council publications with photographs of residents should include positive images of people with a disability and other residents from disadvantaged groups.
- Consider strategies used by other Councils to promote positive access, participation and promotion (eg Sydney City Council's introduction of Braille signage)

3. Staff training:

Achievements:

- Consumers were not aware of any concern about the behaviour, communication or attitude of Council staff to people with a disability.

Remaining barriers & issues:

- Concern was expressed that some staff may limit their vision about what could be achieved because they thought that resources would be inadequate to find a solution to problems. It was argued that it was necessary to raise staff and others' awareness of what Council can actually achieve.
- Concern was also expressed that access was an afterthought to design, rather than an integral first element of design.

Suggestions:

- It is necessary to raise staff and others' awareness of what Council can actually achieve.
- Need for staff training to enhance their communication skills and confidence in dealing with people with a disability and to improve their knowledge of the expectations of the community and government in relation to supporting people with a disability (eg in relation to dignity, age appropriate communication, respect etc)
- Council staff need information about the opportunities available for enhancing access and participation of people with a disability and how to access / obtain these (eg Telephone Typewriter facilities)

4. Information about services:

Achievements:

- Library now has some large print and talking books.
- Library now has a special computer and desk for people with visual impairments.
- Local newspaper was seen to be very supportive of community and Council initiatives, with Council page seen as very positive.
- Gunnedah Community Transport has just produced a new pamphlet on its service which has been distributed to all households in the Gunnedah Shire, highlighting its support for any people with a transport disadvantage.
- Gunnedah Special Support Service has also produced and distributed a new pamphlet.

Remaining barriers & issues:

- Gunnedah has no Telephone Typewriter facility.
- Local radio station seen to be less supportive of community initiatives and announcements.

Suggestions:

- Council to post key documents on Council website and achievements under Disability Action Plan.
- Perhaps the introduction of a Council newsletter to be distributed regularly or with rates notices, to summarize key Council and community activities and achievements, including those relating to people with a disability.

- Increased use of local paper to promote key achievements and activities.
- Introduction of talking newspaper.
- Enhanced information to Council and to public about what services actually provide (rather than promoting names of services)
- Developing community care centre into a one-stop information shop, particularly utilizing and building upon the Carelink service, possibly also incorporating publicly advertised wheelchair accessible toilet.
- Council to offer large print versions of pamphlets and other information produced by photocopying and enlarging A4 sheets to A3 size.
- Avoiding (unexplained, unuseful or unnecessary) acronyms, jargon and abbreviations in written and other communications.
- Consider incorporating a call waiting message system on Council phones, to promote key initiatives, achievements and actions of Council, including those for people with a disability.
- Consider use of touchscreen, audi-visual resources in key foyer areas of Council buildings.
- Consider a collaborative project with the Chamber of Commerce to improve Central Business District signage.
- Enhancing the knowledge of general Council staff (particularly reception staff and others dealing with public enquiries) about Gunnedah's community services and roles.

5. Council employment:

Achievements:

- Council has an Equal Opportunity Management Plan and sub-committee and has recently endorsed increased usage of traineeships for people from historically disadvantaged groups.
- Council also offers literacy support and training for employees with literacy difficulties.

Remaining barriers & issues:

Suggestions:

- Council needs to further explore the level of affirmative action it should be promoting.
- Council could explore an enhanced relationship with disability employment support agencies, particularly those supporting open employment initiatives.

6. Complaints:

Achievements:

- Providers reported that Council had a good history of responding to and resolving access issues.

Remaining barriers & issues:

- Reluctance of people with a disability, aged people and their carers to complain. Many community members still do not feel sufficiently confident to complain.
- Staff may perceive insurmountable barriers to solving issues of concern, which may affect how they receive and negotiate complaints or suggestions.

Suggestions:

- Consider using SCAN and consumer representative group to communicate and negotiate issues of concern to Council, as a complementary strategy to Council's complaints and feedback process.

7. Other issues:

Achievements:

Remaining barriers & issues:

Suggestions:

- Council's Youth Services Coordinator to plan and develop enhanced opportunities for general community participation for youth with a disability.
- Need to develop more co-operative working relationships between Council and key stakeholders.
- Exploration of mutually beneficial ways of achieving common goals (eg applying for Veterans' Affairs funding to upgrade facilities around Tambar Springs' War Memorial, including provision of accessible public toilet)

F: Employee survey form

DISABILITY ACCESS SURVEY

Gunnedah Shire is preparing a Disability Action Plan, in line with the NSW Government's Disability Policy Framework⁴. This survey of the Shire's employees will assist the development of Gunnedah's Disability Action Plan, by helping to identify any barriers which inhibit or prevent people with disabilities from accessing Council's services.

This survey is in two parts. It would be appreciated if all Council staff would complete the first part. Employees with a disability are requested to also complete the second part.

Confidentiality

Information provided by staff will be treated in the strictest confidence and under no circumstances will it be used for any other purpose than what has been stated above. Furthermore, to ensure the confidentiality of the individual involved, survey forms will be analysed by an external contracted consultant, who will retain completed forms. Management will not have direct access to the information provided by particular individuals.

Completion of the Survey

It would be appreciated if you could complete the attached form, place it in the sealed envelope provided and post it, by Wednesday 6 February 2002 to Dianne Beatty, PO Box 962, Armidale NSW 2350. Should you have any questions about, or comments on, this survey or need assistance with its completion, please ring Dianne Beatty on 6775 2257.

Your cooperation in completing this survey form is appreciated.

⁴ The NSW Government's Disability Policy Framework has identified seven priority areas for action:

1. physical access;
2. promoting positive community attitudes;
3. training of staff;
4. information about services;
5. employment in the public sector;
6. complaints procedures; and
7. any other area(s) identified as a being a priority.

Part 1: General Information & Awareness of Disability Issues

Q1. Are you employed: 1. full time, permanent 2. part time, permanent 3. on a casual basis 4. on a temporary contract

Q2. How long have you been employed by Gunnedah Shire:

1. Under 1 yr 2. 1 - 4 yrs 3. 5 - 9 yrs 4. 10 yrs or more

Q3. In which of the following types of position are you employed?

1. Senior Manager 2. Manager 3. Supervisor, group or project leader or overseer 4. Other indoor staff 5. Other outdoor staff

Q4. If you are **not** a senior manager, in what area of Council do you work?

1. Environment & development 2. Finance 3. Human Resources 4. Corporate and client services 5. Economic Development and Tourism
 6. Community Services 7. Engineering 8. Information Technology & Training 9. Other, please specify:

Q5a. Do you have contact with the public? 1. yes 2. no

Q5b. If yes, how often is this contact with the public?

1. frequently 2. occasionally 3. rarely

Q5c. How does this contact take place? Please tick all appropriate boxes.

1. phone 2. over counter / in reception
 3. correspondence 4. in person
 5. community information sessions/public meetings 6. other. Please specify:

Q6. Broadly, how would you rate YOUR level of understanding of the access requirements of people with a disability and of their special needs in accessing Council services?

1. Could be improved 2. Okay 3. Good 4. Don't know or not relevant to my position.

Q7. Has your work area:

- a. identified any special needs and requirements of employees or customers with a disability? 1. yes 2. no
- b. asked people with a disability to comment on your services, policies or practices? 1. yes 2. no
- c. written policies, procedures or guidelines which take into account the needs of people with a disability? 1. yes 2. no

Q7d. Does your work area offer special assistance to help people with a disability to access Council's services? 1. yes 2. no (go to Q9)

Q8. If yes, please tick the special assistance offered. Please tick all appropriate boxes.

1. Additional communication support:
- 1.1 interpreters
 - 1.2 audio loop
 - 1.3 e-mail/Internet
 - 1.4 information in special formats (Braille, large print, audio cassettes etc)
 - 1.5 support people/advocates
 - 1.6 Telephone Typewriter (TTY)
 - 1.7 other communication support. Please specify:
-
2. Special physical access support:
- 2.1 physically accessible meeting areas
 - 2.2 face to face meetings at a venue of the person's choice
 - 2.3 other access support. Please specify:
-
3. Other special support:
- 3.1 training of staff in working with and supporting people with a disability
 - 3.2 other support. Please specify:
-

Q9. Are you aware of any barriers that would inhibit people with disabilities from accessing the services that you provide? 1. yes 2. no (go to Q11)

Q10a. What are the barriers that affect their access to your service(s):

- 1. verbal communication difficulties
- 2. phone communication difficulties, including difficulties accessing TTY
- 3. Council or section information not available in alternative formats (eg braille, large print, audio cassette, plain language etc)
- 4. other written communication difficulties
- 5. skill or confidence of staff in supporting or communicating with people with a disability
- 6. other communication difficulties
- 7. physical access to Council buildings or facilities
- 8. attitudes or behaviour of Council staff
- 9. attitudes or behaviour of people with a disability
- 10. other.

Q10b. If you ticked any of the boxes in question 10a, please provide more detail about these barriers.

Q10c. What action can you suggest that Council could take to overcome these barriers?

Q11a. Have you ever had any training to increase your awareness of the needs of people with a disability and your skills in working with or supporting them? 1. yes 2. no (go to Q 12)

Q11b. If yes, how long ago did you receive this training:

1. Under 1 yr 2. 1 - 2 yrs 3. 2 - 3 yrs 4. 3 - 4 yrs 5. over 4 years

Q12. Do you think you need training in:

- | | Yes | No |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| • disability awareness? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |
| • Council's responsibilities in supporting people with a disability? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |
| • access issues for people with disabilities? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |
| • access issues for people with disabilities of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |
| • access issues for people with disabilities of non-English speaking background? | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |
| • use of equipment eg TTY, audio loop, working with AUSLAN interpreters, presentations etc. | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |
| • other areas: please specify: | <input type="checkbox"/> 1. | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. |

Q13. Do you have a disability? **No.** 2. Thank you for completing this survey. Please return your response in the envelope provided. **Yes.** 1. Please complete part 2.

Part 2: To be completed by employees with a disability

This part is only to be completed by employees with a disability. Completion of this part of the survey is entirely optional. Please only respond to those questions where you feel comfortable providing the information requested. The questions are intended to establish if there are any patterns in the employment of people with disabilities within Council and to identify barriers to career development.

Q14. What type of a disability do you have? If your disability covers more than one of the broad categories listed below, please tick all boxes that are relevant:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. an acquired brain injury/cognitive disability | <input type="checkbox"/> 2. blind/vision impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. an intellectual disability | <input type="checkbox"/> 4. deaf/hearing impaired |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. a neurological disability | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. a physical disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. a disability brought on by an organism capable of causing disease eg HIV/AIDS | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. a psychiatric or psychological disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 9. a physical disfigurement | |

Q15a. Have you personally experienced any barriers that would hinder or inhibit your recruitment to, or career development within, Gunnedah Shire: 1. yes 2. no (go to Q16)

Q15b. If yes, what was the nature of the barriers experienced:

- 1. selection/recruitment difficulties
- 2. difficulties with workplace modifications in order to undertake the duties of your current position
- 3. difficulties with work restructuring in order to undertake the duties of your current position
- 4. less than equitable access to training
- 5. less than equitable access to promotion / career development opportunities
- 6. discriminatory behaviour by a staff member or the organisation as a result of your having a disability
- 7. difficulties with the values and culture of the organisation or of other employees
- 8. other difficulties.

G: Summary of survey results

Analysis of survey response:

- 170 questionnaires were given to Council staff in January 2002 (with their payslips). At the time of the survey Council had 184 employees.
- Staff were requested to complete and return the forms by 6 February 2002. By 19 February, 59 survey forms had been returned. The response rate was 35%.
- The majority of respondents (76%) were employed full time with the remainder being employed part-time (12%), on a casual basis (7%) or on temporary contracts (3%). This generally reflects Council's employment mix, although casuals were slightly more likely to have submitted responses than part-time staff.
- Half (48%) the respondents had worked for Council for more than 5 years. This reflects Council's mix.
- 36% of responses were from managers or supervisors, who only represent 13% of staff. This represents a response from virtually all managers or supervisors (but 3).
- Of the remainder of Council's staff, 63% of respondents were employed indoors and 40% outdoors, compared to an employment mix of 30% to 70%.
- The majority of responses were from workers in the Community Services (34%) or Engineering (32%) sections. 15% of respondents were from Environment and Development. The staff from the Community Services section were much more likely to have responded than those from Engineering, with these sections having 16% and 58% of Council's employees respectively. This may reflect the high proportion of outdoor staff in Engineering and their comparatively low response rate.

Interpreting the results:

- The response rates of individual sections and types of employees (described above) should be considered when interpreting these results.
- Responses to a number of questions within work areas seemed to be contradictory. It is not possible from the survey responses to determine whether this results from sub-sections within work areas having different practices or from individuals within these areas not knowing about their work area's policies or special assistance.

Survey results:

- Almost all staff (97%) said they had **frequent contact** with the public. This was most likely to be in person (96%) and more likely to be by phone (79%) than through correspondence (68%).
- Most people considered that their understanding of access issues was "good" (44%) or "okay" (29%). This trend was true of all areas, except for Information Technology and Training where only 1 of its 4 respondents said their understanding was "good" or "okay". **20% of respondents felt that their understanding could be improved.**
- 42 people said that their work area had identified the special requirements of people with a disability. However, although these 42 came from all work areas identified on the survey, some respondents in Environment and Development, Corporate Services, Engineering and Information and Technology said their work area had not. **Only 19 of**

the 42 had asked people with a disability to comment on their services, 13 of whom were in community services.

- 23 respondents from Environment and Development, Community Services, Engineering and Information and Technology said that their work area had **written policies** and guidelines for people with a disability. 24 from these areas, plus Tourism, said they offered **special assistance**. 14 identified additional communication support and 23 special physical access support. Assistance was most likely to be through having physically accessible meeting areas or information being available in special formats. Many also listed e-mail as a special service. 10 people said that their area specifically trained staff in working with people with a disability (8 of these respondents being from community services). It should be noted that, as in the previous point, some staff within these work areas said that they did not have written procedures or did not offer special assistance.
- **47% of respondents were aware of barriers that would inhibit people from accessing their services.** These people listed a wide range of barriers, including information not being available in alternative formats (14 respondents), issues of physical access to Council premises (15 respondents), verbal communication difficulties (8), staff skill or confidence (8) and the attitudes of Council staff (6) predominated. Only 2 people said that the attitude or behaviour of people with a disability was a barrier. (A summary of additional comments about these barriers and strategies to overcome them appears below.)
- 18 or 31% of staff said that they had received **training** in the disability area. These staff were all from Environment and Development, Community Services, Engineering and Information and Technology. Half of these had received their training in the past two years.
- 41, or 69% of, respondents felt that they needed training in at least one area related to supporting people with a disability. They were in order of frequency Council's responsibilities (32), access issues (31), disability awareness (28), access for people with a disability of non-English speaking background (24), equipment (21) and access issues for people with a disability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent (16). Most of the respondents who identified training needs were from Environment and Development, Corporate Services, Community Services, Engineering and Information and Technology.
- 5 of the 59 responses were from **staff who identified themselves as having a disability** (four physical and one hearing). None reported barriers in their own employment or problems in their work area. However 4 of the 5 identified barriers facing people with a disability seeking to use Council services.

Comments about barriers that inhibited people with a disability from accessing Council services and suggestions to overcome these barriers:

Physical access problems identified included:

The main Council building:

- engineering services and part of the Admin office being upstairs. Though mention was made of the "front counter for all" system, some staff felt that it would be better if the client could get upstairs rather than the paper come down.
- Council committee rooms not being wheelchair-accessible.
- "The self-closing doors are too strong for disabled people. They should be made softer."

Toilets:

- “There are not enough disabled toilets and the ones that there are, are unsuitable. The existing ones should be improved.”

The theatre and other public buildings:

- the new theatre’s “demeaning” back entrance for those with mobility difficulties. The seats for the disabled being in the very front row and off to the far side were described as “the worst seats in the house”.
- the step at the front of the Creative Arts Building is too high for people using wheelchairs and walkers.
- many older buildings have poor access. The lack of purpose-built or modified buildings in Gunnedah is a problem.
- While the Smithurst theatre is suitable for senior citizens groups, they have to vacate it whenever it is needed for some other purpose.
- Pre-poll voting is held in inappropriate buildings.

The pool:

- At the Swimming Pool, there is no access for the disabled to the 50m pool and only limited access to the 25m.
- The pool needs a set of stairs in the 50m and a chair lift to suit both pools.
- There are also problems with access to the complex itself -including difficulties gaining use of the rear door access.

The saleyards:

- Though the saleyards are “designed for livestock not people”, the gravel surfaces are difficult for wheelchairs and the catwalks provide limited access.

The Information centre:

- Wheelchair access to the Information Centre is difficult as the main door is very resistant to movement. A sliding door is needed.

General community access issues:

- Structural issues regarding access/availability need to be rectified through an identified works improvement program over an identified timeframe.
- A perception that Council lacks interest in the community’s wants and needs is the biggest hurdle to improving disabled access. There is a need to involve actual people with a disability in streetscape beautification program.
- Existing Council buildings should be made to have access.
- Council should work to improve access to all town buildings.
- Disabled people become embarrassed if it is hard to access a building so they stop going.
- Access to the facilities in some parks is not up to standard. “Facilities are good but getting to them is a problem”. Need better paths.
- There is a shortage of disabled car parking spaces.
- There is a lack of street crossing aids for people who are visually impaired and an absence of braille signage. There needs to be a change of surface at pedestrian

crossings. Problems are being created by shop owners who put goods and other obstacles on footpaths. The entrances to many shops are too narrow for wheelchairs.

- There is a need for better/larger signage on some buildings. And road signs on the highway directing people to facilities such as the community care centre.

Communication issues:

- There are language barriers both written and spoken. Council's documents are only available in English and there is no interpreter service. There are no alternatives for deaf or blind people.
- Policies and public documents should be in braille, on audio and in large print format.
- Cultural events are only publicised in print form. If they were published on the Internet it would make reproduction in braille easier.
- If people are illiterate, it should be stressed that they are eligible for one-on-one service to have the information explained to them.
- There is confusion about TTY – as to whether it is available in Gunnedah and to how it can be accessed.

Training, employment and other issues:

- Council should employ more people of different ethnic backgrounds.
- Staff need to have better training in disability issues. Some staff feel uncomfortable dealing with people with a disability. This is sometimes an issue with work experience placements. Particularly when staff are not told of co-worker's special needs.
- Need for training in dealing with speech impairment or intellectual impairment.
- Staff want training in order to become more confident and thereby assist the disabled better. Staff attitudes are not good anyway and training would help them to better understand disability.
- Council needs a policy to better support people with a disability.

H: People who assisted with the preparation of this plan

Name	Interest or Organisation
Vanessa Knight	Early Childhood Intervention (parent of a child with a disability)
Pauline Camilleri	Parent of a child with a disability
Les O'Neil	Resident with a physical disability
Lesley Ceissman	Tambar Springs Neighbour Aid
Denis Evans	Gunnedah Oxley Community Options / Respite Care
Rod Byrnes	Gunnedah Fire Brigade
Brett Stonestreet	Gunnedah Shire Council
Malcolm Jones	Gunnedah Shire Council
Rachel Geddes	Gunnedah Community Health
Merilyn Bell	Gunnedah Community Health
Marie-Louise Timbs	Gunnedah Community Health
Symone Fuller	Gunnedah Community Health
Sue Cox	Gunnedah Shire Council
Cecily Keating	Gunnedah Special Support Service
Michael Hull	Gunnedah Workshop Enterprises
Joyce Schild	Gunnedah Meals on Wheels
Judy O'Connor	Commonwealth Carelink
Lesley Mills	Gunnedah Respite Care Service
Joan Selway	Gunnedah Community Transport
Mike Silver	Gunnedah Shire Council
Ruth Pope	Gunnedah Community Health
Heather Welch	G S Kidd Memorial Public School
Kerry Bee	Gunnedah Meals on Wheels
Baharak Saheb	Gunnedah Shire Council
Lyndon Hughes	Gunnedah Shire Council
Richard White	Gunnedah Shire Council
Vicki Snow	Gunnedah Shire Council
Gary Brown	Gunnedah Shire Council
Kristen McElroy	Gunnedah Shire Council
Tim Muldoon	Gunnedah Shire Council
Wayne Cooper	Gunnedah Shire Council
Jon Stone	Gunnedah Shire Council

I: Reference List

The following documents were consulted in the preparation of this document:

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Ageing and Disability Department, NSW Health & NSW Government, 1998. *NSW Government Disability Policy Framework* and associated guidelines and handbooks

Armidale Dumaresq Council 2000. *Disability Action Plan*

Bellingen Shire Council 2000. *Disability Discrimination Act (1992) Action Plan*

Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, 2001. *Disability Contact Officer Newsletter, October 2001*.

Department of Local Government & Moxon, Green and Associates Pty Ltd, 2000. *Disability Action Plan 2001-2003*

Department of Local Government 1998. *Social / Community Planning and Reporting Guidelines*.

Gunnedah Shire Council 1999. *Social / Community Plan*

Gunnedah Shire Council, ?. *Equal Employment Opportunity Management Plan*

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1998. *Developing an effective Action Plan*.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1998. *Disability Discrimination Act Action Plans: A Guide for State and Territory Government Departments and Agencies*.

Lismore City Council 1998. *Disability Action Plan*.

J: List of disability support Organisations participating in Gunnedah SCAN (Service Co-ordinators' Area Network)

Northcott Society- Tamworth	Tel: 6766 5755
Department of Community Services	Tel: 6768 6421
Gunnedah Community Health	Tel: 6740 2804
Gunnedah Shire Council Respite Service	Tel: 6740 2252
Gunnedah Shire Council Community Transport	Tel: 6740 2254
HomeCare	Tel: 6740 251
Homes North Community Housing	Tel: 6742 0363
Gunnedah Oxley Community Options	Tel: 6740 2242
Gunnedah Workshop Enterprises	Tel: 6742 1318
Challenge Gunnedah	Tel: 6742 0625 6766 1288
Peel Valley Training	Tel: 6742 6500

K: Glossary of terms and Acronyms

SCAN	Service Co-ordinators' Area Network related to Home & Community Care target group
HACC	Home & Community Care
HACC target group	People with a disability, frail aged people and their carers
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
HREOC	Human Right and Equal Opportunity Commission
CBD	Central Business District
MHR	Manager Human Resources
MED	Manager Environment & Development
MES	Manager Engineering Services
MCS	Manager Community Services
MTED	Manager Tourism and Economic Development
MANEX	Management and Executive group meeting