



Minutes

Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Tuesday 18 June 2024

Location: Dougherty Community Centre and Zoom

Chair: Glenda Hewitt

Attendees: **Members:** Ella Gillis; Glenda Hewitt; Margaret Kay; Wendy Norton; Audrey Thomas; Helen Woodman

WCC Staff: Ellen Miller (Community Venues and Services Team Leader); Stephen Alderton (Open Space Team Lead); Susan Chen (Community Projects Officer); Bushra Salam (Governance)

Apologies/absent: **Members (apologies):** Suzanne Hartley
Srishti Mahhajan
Elisha Mangassarian (absent)
Mark Tonga (absent)

Guests (apologies): Mayor Tanya Taylor
Councillor Anna Greco

Guests: Open Space Team Lead
Community Projects Officer

Attachments: End of Term Report

Items

Item	Topic / Discussion	Action
1	Welcome The meeting was declared open at 4pm when the quorum was reached.	
	Acknowledgement of Country Governance Officer, acknowledged Country on behalf of Council.	
	Apologies Suzanne Hartley and Srishti Mahhajan	
	Absent Elisha Mangassarian and Mark Tonga	
	Declarations of interest	

A link to the Disclosure of interest by Committee Members form was circulated with the Agenda.

Glenda Hewitt has declared a standing non-pecuniary less than significant interest as a Board Member of the Housing Connection.

Margaret Kay has declared a standing non-pecuniary less than significant interest as a Director of Yourside Australia, stating, *“there may be (in the future) a relationship between Yourside Australia and WCC. None known at present.”*

2 Appointment of Committee Chair

Nominations for Chair of the meeting:

- Wendy Norton nominated Glenda Hewitt.
- Margaret Kay seconded her nomination.
- No other nominations were received.
- The Committee voted the Chair of the meeting Glenda Hewitt.
- All in favour.

In accordance with Item 5.2 of the terms of Reference, the committee appointed Glenda Hewitt as the Chair for this meeting.

3 Confirmation of Previous Minutes – 16 April 2024

Moved by Margaret Kay and Seconded by Audrey Thomas, the Committee unanimously adopted the minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2024.

4 Actions from Previous Meetings

Draft Digital Strategy Update: No update.

5 Strategic Activities

5.1 Standing item – Reconciliation Action Plan

Moved by Glenda and seconded by Wendy Norton the Committee unanimously passed the following recommendation that:

“Council reports annually and publicly on delivery achievements of the RAP.”

5.2 Informal Working Group Update

Community Venues and Services Team Leader (Ellen Miller)

advised preparations for Seniors Rights Services information session scheduled for 1 July 2024 have been completed. Wendy Norton thanked the Community Venues and Services Team Leader for providing a venue, creating the flyer and promoting the session across Council's social media platforms and Aged Care networks.

Wendy Norton forwarded this invitation to the Federation of Progress Association. Members of the Access and Inclusion Committee agreed to promote across their own networks.

5.3 Presentation on Draft Volunteer Strategy by the Community Projects Officer

Community Projects Officer (Susan Chen) presented Draft Volunteer Strategy to the Committee. Salient features of her presentation were as follows:

- Council currently has 600 volunteers
- This strategy succeeds the volunteer strategy 2016-2021
- This Strategy is designed to be high level & supported by implementation action plans
- Council celebrates its volunteers

The Committee members made the following observations:

- The Strategy did not have a definition of Volunteers.
- Committee enquired as to whether Access Committee members were deemed as volunteers.

Community Projects Officer took note of the above points.

5.4 Information on support of LGBTQIA+ communities

Susan Chen briefed the Committee on how Council supports LGBTQIA+ communities.

- Around 644 young people participated in survey conducted by Youth Team in relation to the needs of the LGBTQIA+ community. Results are available on Council's Youth Services webpage
- Council has a library program- QSpace which includes collections and offer general resources.

- Council gave a grant to Willoughby Pride to host their own *Willoughby Pride Event* in March 2023.
- Ella Gillis asked if Council had planned activities for the upcoming Pride month and noted that all neighboring Councils around their LGA do events but not Willoughby City Council.
- Community Projects Officer noted that Council had not. However, World Pride 2023 was hosted in Sydney which was celebrated across all LGAs.
- Ella Gillis provided resources to Community Projects Officer which support people from the LGBTQUA+ to pass share with the Youth/Library teams.

The Committee thanked Susan for the presentation.

5.5 Presentation by Council’s new Open Space Team Lead

- Open Space Team Lead (Stephen Alderton), introduced himself and briefed the Committee about Council’s Public Space Strategy which was adopted in March 2024.
- The Committee members made a number of following observations:
- Wendy Norton noted that in the last 20 years the needs of children with disability were not met especially those who were neuro-diverse. She would like to ensure the voices of all with disability are heard when undertaking community engagement activities in relation to Open Spaces.
- Margaret Kay enquired if Council was following Universal Design principles when designing/upgrading parks. Open Space Team Lead confirmed they were.
- Open Space Team Lead noted that Council has allocated \$5,000,000 budget over the next ten years for the maintenance and development of parks and sports grounds.
- Open Space Team Lead stated that access is always at the forefront of what they do but they are sometimes limited by

Community Venues and Services Team Leader to send link to Public space & recreation strategy to the Committee members.

the funds available.

- Wendy Norton asked if there is any opportunity for grants. Stephen Alderton responded they were proactive in applying for grants.
- Helen Woodman stated some parks that she visited did not have accessible entrances, appropriate footpaths for mobility aids or enough seating that meet the needs of people with disability.
- Wendy Norton asked if the new Open Space Team Lead had received the report on accessibility of Willoughby Parks prepared by a previous committee member.
- Community Venues and Services Team Leader informed the Committee that it had been to the previous Team Lead but would forward it again.
- Open Space Team Lead stated that they are focusing currently on 'place making' to meet the needs of the community which at times can see better outcomes for the community and work with available resources.
- Moving forward, Open Space Team Lead is looking forward receiving feedback and input from the Committee in relation to Open Space projects.

6 Other Business

Presentation on Seniors Festival (1-28 March 2023) by Venues and Services Team Leader:

Community Venues and Services Team Leader shared the outcome of Senior Festival survey with the Committee. The Committee thanked her for all her hard work and for sharing the positive feedback with them.

End of Term Report:

As stated in the terms of reference, each advisory committee is required to submit a report on the achievements of the committee at the end of the term of Council. The Achievement report for the

Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee as included is at Attachment 1a.

Key achievements of the committee include:

- At its inaugural meeting on 09 May 2023, the Committee requested, the draft Reconciliation Action Plan be brought to the Committee for comments, after the second round of public consultation.
- At its 15 August 2023 meeting, the Committee received and discussed a presentation regarding draft report regarding the audit and design of accessibility car parking spaces and policy work in this field. Received and discussed a presentation regarding work undertaken on the Draft Public Toilet Strategy.
- At its meeting on 15 August 2023, Mr Tonga volunteered to prepare a vulnerable person discussion paper. The Committee set up an informal working party to aid Mr Tonga in the production of said paper in relation to identifying gaps in the current NDIS system.
- At its June 2023 meeting, the Committee requested Council Open Space planner to attend a future meeting of the Committee and provide access to the Bales Park draft Master Plan and to answer queries about playground inclusion.
- The Committee pointed out the challenges of accessibility of the playgrounds and availability of right equipment.

7 Meeting Conclusion

The meeting concluded at 6:05 pm.

FINAL REPORT
Access and Inclusion Committee
18 June 2024

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Wendy Norton, Audrey Thomas, Glenda Hewitt, Margaret Kay, Helen Woodman, Mark Tonga, Srishti Mahhajan, Elisha Mangassarian, Suzanne Hartley, Julia Norton (resigned), Honie Boyd (resigned), Ella Gillis (resigned).

Over the course of the committee's term there were three resignations from the committee.

Meetings held

- 9 May 2023
- June 2023

23/24 financial year

- 15 August
- 19 Sept 2023
- 21 November
- 20 February 2024
- 16 April
- 18 June

The committee notes that the Council restricted the number of meetings which could be held. This severely hampered the ability of participants to maximise the potential benefits of tapping into the skill-base of committee members who were otherwise unknown to each other prior to the committee being formed.

MOTION

That Council:

- 1. Interpret the words "*a maximum of six occasions per year*" in term 9.1 of the Model Terms of Reference and each Advisory Committee's Terms of Reference to mean a maximum of six occasions per financial year.**
- 2. Advise each Advisory Committee to schedule their respective meeting dates in accordance with this interpretation.**

Executive summary

The Access and Inclusion Committee (the Committee) would like to assist Council to revamp the committee structure to facilitate an effective framework for future committees. Used well, the lived experience and subject matter expertise of committee members would be a valuable resource for developing and reviewing Council policies however under the current format, this is unlikely to happen. The Access and Inclusion Committee notes that the selection process was less than accessible, the terms of reference were too broad, the number of meetings were not adequate, the technology of hybrid meetings was substandard and the meeting agenda too bureaucratic.

A major achievement made by the committee stood outside the terms of reference: coordinating, a one-off event in collaboration with the Seniors Rights Service to build awareness of planning for the future (Power of Attorney, Guardianship, Wills and Advance Care Directives).

Council officers are doing some good work with the Reconciliation Access Plan, Disability Inclusion Action plan, mobility parking, engagement strategy, development of a digital strategy and the Seniors Festival but

the Access and Inclusion Committee was never given any pre-reading, nor the opportunity to provide input into reviews of existing policies or development of new policies prior to these policies and/or events being put together. The committee was effectively only asked to rubber stamp the work undertaken by Council. In some cases, the Committee provided input (eg the Council Engagement Strategy) but were not given any indication as to whether that input was implemented.

Committee Selection process

The online application process seeking Committee members was difficult and opaque for many people including people with disabilities, and those lacking technology skills. The application forms were difficult to navigate, assumed a level of digital competency, and the selection process was not transparent. There were also gaps in 'inclusive' representation on the committee. Who decides how many people constitute an advisory group? Who decides the composition of the group? The lack of success in recruiting members to cover all the groups that the Committee is meant to represent demonstrates the inadequacies in the selection and committee application process.

A suggestion would be to invite all applicants to a meeting, to present to them what is required and to get them to self-select based on what is expected of the committee and their preparedness to fulfil the commitment required to actively contribute to the Committee.

Meeting functionality

Representatives of the Access and Inclusion committee consisted of a number of people who had previously been on the Council's former iteration of the Committee and an equal number of 'new' people who had responded to Council's outreach when the committees were re-formed. Meetings were scheduled every two months for 1.5 hours. The Access and Inclusion Committee was therefore required to achieve something meaningful in nine hours.

The previous Committee reviewed DAs related to community infrastructure and developments, provided lived experience advice related to disability access to public facilities and reviewed and provided input to Council policies prior to them being put out to public consultation.

It is noted that compliance with guidelines does not necessarily mean the optimum outcome achieved, as, for example, people with disabilities are generally able to provide lived experience perspectives to produce better outcomes. In other words, the committee structure in the past was a valuable community resource.

Effectively, at each meeting, the Access and Inclusion group was presented with a PowerPoint presentation of what council officers were working on and asked to comment.

This process precluded

- pre-meeting research hampered the possibility of doing site visits in advance and
- limited the opportunity to talk to other community members and bring their feedback back to Council via the committee.

It takes time for a group of disparate people to learn each other's strengths and weaknesses and it was patently obvious that under the structure of the current committee which ran to a Council meeting structure, the likelihood of being able to provide meaningful input and get as a group was limited.

The committee had no sense that the general input provided in the committee meetings had any outcome or impact on "projects and initiatives"

The online "Have your say" process serves the same purpose as the Access and Inclusion Committee, albeit without the ability to discuss or brainstorm important policy matters as a group. Discussion generates ideas and improvements or the ability to capture problems in policy design intent/ documentation. Discussion also provides those members without a disability insight into the specific issues faced by various disabilities. The issues facing non-represented groups were never fully addressed.

In addition, meeting every two months was less than optimal.

After multiple meetings there were still people who did not know the name and subject matter expertise of other people on the committee so engaging fruitful constructive conversations were hampered. Several committee participants who were neither familiar nor comfortable in a formal committee framework were reluctant to engage because they did not feel comfortable and safe.

A community committee should function in a less structured, encouraging and more people-friendly format.

Terms of reference (ToR)

The ToR are very broad in terms of who is supposed to be represented by Committee – ie older people, people with disability, youth, LGBTQI+, CALD and Aboriginal. The difficulty of representing the interests of all these groups in one committee is noted, but not insurmountable.

The structure of the Terms of Reference for the committee seriously impeded productive input. Members of the former committee noted that the role of the Committee had changed significantly to only dealing with providing advice on strategic matters as stated in the Terms of Reference, to provide advice on implementing key projects and initiatives, and to "focus on strategic initiatives".

The Access and Inclusion Committee is supposed to provide feedback on strategic access and inclusion issues and policy development and advice on the implementation of key projects and initiatives. This is a big ask for a committee that only meets every 2 months. At the moment the committee is really only able to comment on policies after they are fully developed.

The other role of the committee is to advise on how to raise awareness and promote behaviour change within the Council LGA on community attitudes and behaviours, in order to promote community leadership, participation and inclusion, in relation to accessible services and infrastructure. This is more an operational function of Council, and not something the Committee can really 'change'.

Putting aside the fact that the committee's Terms of Reference were significantly different to those of the previous structure, there was a concern that the 2023-2024 committee was set up to be ineffective due to the constraints imposed by the Terms of Reference.

While Council defined success as:

Advisory Committees will be successful if they

- Focus on strategic initiatives that support the delivery or review of the identified strategic priorities including increased community uptake of relevant initiatives
- Are active and productive
- Are where members collaborate
- Promote self-initiative, resilience and empowerment of both members and the broader community
- Are representative of the community and community interests

The Committee regarded success as:

- (1) having had meaningful input to improving the quality of Council policies and strategies prior to being put out to public consultation
- (2) Providing lived experience input to DAs to improve access and inclusion in public facilities.

Resource and governance heavy.

It is noted that at each Access and Inclusion Committee meeting there was a minimum of two and sometimes up to four, Council Officers present. Council officers set the agenda (albeit after asking for input from committee members), recorded the minutes and defined the structure of the meeting procedures.

The committee members recommend attendance of one Council Officer (to act as an interface) and one Council officer who is a subject matter expert on policy that the committee is reviewing. The policy being reviewed and discussed at a committee meeting should have been circulated prior to the meeting to ensure meaningful use of the committee's limited meeting time.

A committee chair and a scribe would guide the meeting through a less structured agenda and a commitment that the only documents required from the committee be a windup report and a summary of the meeting topic. The committee members should be responsible for presenting reports, recommendations and suggestions to Council, not Council officers.

It is noted that committee members often did not know each other and had little opportunity to discover areas of expertise and knowledge of each participating committee member. There was little opportunity within the meeting structure to get past this barrier. As most community members have little experience with official meeting structures, the formality of the 1.5-hour meetings tended to stifle constructive input.

In addition, the technology used during hybrid meetings was inadequate to encourage participation. One microphone on a computer hosting Teams/Zoom meant that people in the room could not be heard by people using technology to attend the meeting remotely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The way the Access and Inclusion Committee harnesses community expertise in a meaningful way needs to be reviewed to ensure it is not only a 'Have Your Say' forum after the fact.
2. Meeting outcomes could be improved if the committee had been engaged in providing input to policies and strategies prior to them being finalised for public consultation.
3. Information presented to the meeting should be made available before the meeting to allow members time to facilitate constructive community input.
5. To improve engagement with specific target groups on issues related to them, perhaps specific interest groups need to be established to provide feedback on key council policies as they are being developed. This could happen prior to the public consultation (Have Your Say) process. It would require Council to set up a mechanism for early engagement on key issues. This could be part of the engagement strategy of council.
6. To be able to provide strategic advice, the Committee needs to be given advanced notice of council policies that are being developed and an opportunity to provide early input into them.
7. The Committee can advise Council on ways to make their policies more inclusive and more reflective of the needs of the community but it cannot advise on how to change community behaviour.
8. The Committee should be able to discuss and review major developments and projects and provide input regarding accessibility.
9. The Committee should provide oversight of Actions in the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP), particularly on "Liveable Communities" and be provided with a report on what is being done within each financial year, as well as others that may be identified by Committee members or the public.
10. The Committee should provide input on any matters of public importance that require addressing universal access and improvements to access, and should be able to advocate for issues raised by the public as well as identifying issues requiring implementation.
11. The committee members recommend attendance of one Council Officer (to act as an interface) and one Council officer who is a subject matter expert on policy that the committee is reviewing.
12. The technology of hybrid meetings needs to be improved to ensure remote participants are actively and constructively engaged.
13. The committee selection process needs to be simplified and transparent to reach appropriate community members.

Signatories to final report:

Margaret Kay, Glenda Hewitt, Audrey Thomas, Helen Woodman, Mark Tonga, Wendy Norton, Srishti Mahhajan, Suzanne Hartley.