Shellharbour
CITY COUNCIL

DISABILITY INCLUSION

ACTION PLAN

2026 - 2030

Alison Bathe from the Greenacres Outsiders Art Program

Artist: Alison Bathe

Alison is a natural conversationalist who thrives on chatting and socialising, her lively and outgoing personality shining through in everything she does. This vibrancy doesn't just stop at her interactions - it spills over into her artwork, infusing it with the same energy and warmth that she brings to her relationships. Her pieces are a vivid reflection of her spirited nature, capturing the essence of who she is in every brushstroke and design.

Alison lives with a developmental disability, a part of her journey that shapes her experiences in unique ways. Yet, this aspect of her life doesn't dim her light-instead, it underscores the remarkable way she embraces art as both a passion and a means of connection. Her ability to create independently, coupled with her enthusiasm for socialising, highlights her resilience and individuality. Through her colourful canvases, Alison shares a piece of her vibrant soul, inviting others to see the world through her creative and cheerful lens.

Alison created this particular artwork using the directive of ocean/seascape themes. The circles encompass currents, bubbles, foam and turtles.

Communication Board at Hegarty Park, Shellharbour

Contents

Acknowledgement of Country	7
Message from the Mayor and CEO	8
Message from the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee	10
Language and Definitions	12
Types of Disabilities	13
Explaining the Social and Human Rights Model of Disability	14
Background of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan	16
Legislative and Policy Framework	22
Disability in Australia	24
Disability in Shellharbour	25
What the Community Has Told Us	26
Action Plan	28
Focus Area 1	27
Focus Area 2	28
Focus Area 3	30
Focus Area 4	31
Where to From Here	32
Thank you	34
Reference List	35

Acknowledgement of Country

Shellharbour City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Dharawal Country and recognises their continued connection to the land. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and the contribution they make to the life of this City.

Message

From the Mayor and CEO

Shellharbour City is an incredible place that is rich in natural, cultural and social beauty, and it is our vision that this beauty be available to all people. This plan helps to achieve that vision and make Shellharbour a place where everyone can live, work and play to their full potential.

Over the past four years, our previous plan has yielded significant learnings and achievements, particularly in enhancing the accessibility of our communication, developments, infrastructure, recreational facilities and events. We aim to build on these successes to improve support for all, highlighting the diversity of disability and the valuable contributions made by all of our community.

We deeply appreciate all the stakeholders who supported the creation of this plan. We would specifically like to mention Council's Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, who have provided key community-based feedback and advice not only during the engagement period for this plan, but over the 35 years they have been active. We also extend our thanks to the many community members with lived experience, families, carers, disability service providers and organisations who contributed to the making of this plan, and who make Shellharbour City the wonderful and diverse place that it is.

Looking towards the future, we know that by continuing the implementation of our Disability Inclusion Action Plan into 2026-2030, we will be actively making Shellharbour City a better, more inclusive place to live for more of our community. This new plan focuses on empowering people with disability, driving towards greater social justice and inclusion. The plan ensures that access and inclusion remain core to Shellharbour City Council's operations, influencing all organisational decisions and acting as a shared responsibility for all employees.

We look forward to working to achieve the actions set out in this plan, and hope that the Shellharbour community will continue to join us in this journey.

Chris Homer (Mayor, Shellharbour)
Wayde Peterson (Chief Executive Officer)

A person using a wheelchair going through the gate doors at Shellharbour Airport

Message

from the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee

The Shellharbour Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DAIAC) has been operating for over 35 years to make Shellharbour City Council more aware and responsive to the diverse needs of our community. DAIAC advocates and provides advice and priorities to maximise opportunities for people with disability who live in, work in, or visit Shellharbour City.

To develop this plan, DAIAC were consulted to form a better understanding of local needs for people with disability and will be actively engaged in the implementation and monitoring of this plan.

Members of the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee gathered together outside.

DAIAC said:

Shellharbour City Council has led the way when it comes to engaging with people with lived experience and the DAIAC is an example of this. Within our lifetime, the conversation around disability has changed a lot. In the past, people with disabilities have not been recognised or consulted, and to this day some decisions still continue to be made for them, not by them. It is, therefore, positive to have a forum where we can have a voice and present our views on issues that affect us on behalf of the community.

While the previous Disability Inclusion Action Plan shows progress for Shellharbour City Council, more needs to be done to make our area accessible and inclusive. When the city truly takes into consideration the needs of everyone, all of our community benefits.

As members of the DAIAC, we have worked closely with Council to ensure that this plan is grounded in the lived experiences of people with disability. The actions within this plan directly address the barriers that community members have identified, focusing on practical solutions that promote independence, respect and equity.

We want to express our deepest thanks to everyone who shared their insights, stories, and expertise so generously. Your contributions have shaped the key priorities of this plan.

This plan builds on our previous achievements, but we recognise there is more to do. We remain committed to turning these commitments into everyday reality, strengthening our culture, and ensuring that no one is left behind.

We look forward to working side-by-side with Shellharbour City Council as we turn this plan into action and make Shellharbour City a place that can be enjoyed by all.

Language and Definitions

Language is an important part of disability advocacy and policy. Intentionally using language helps us to create a space that is safe, respectful, and welcoming to all. By choosing to use specific wording and phrasing that is person first (people with disability) rather than identity first (disabled person), we are intentionally placing the person at the centre of the conversation.

Definitions are also important. Our previous plans were titled 'Disability Access and Inclusion' to reflect our understanding that inclusion is predicated on people's ability to have equal access. While we have changed the name of this new plan to better align with the NSW state legislation, the concept of access and inclusion is still central to our understanding and process of breaking down and removing barriers. We define these as:

Access:
is when people have permission, choice, and the ability to enter, get to, interact with, or use a thing, place, or person. (Disability Gateway, 2026)

Inclusion:
is when everyone in a group is involved and respected. Diversity is celebrated and things can be changed to suit the needs and preferences of the individual. (Disability Gateway, 2026)

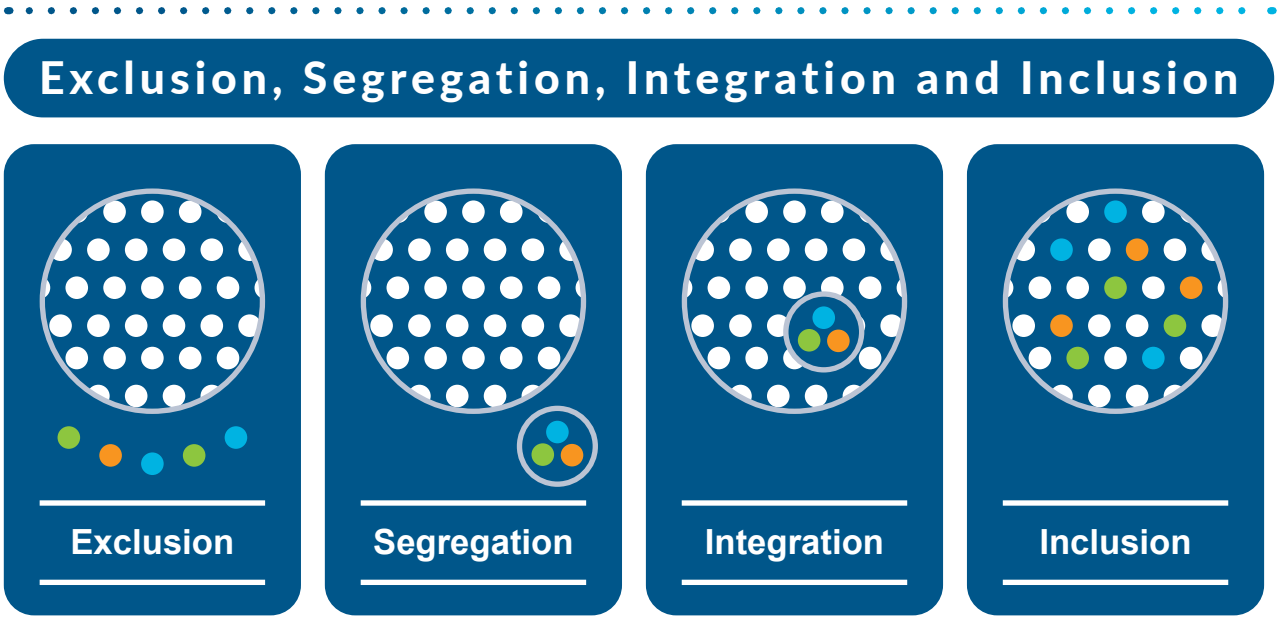


Diagram representing exclusion, segregation, integration and inclusion.

Types of Disabilities

There are many types of disability, and they are a natural part of human life. Some disabilities may be acquired at birth, and some may result from an accident, injury, or disease. There are disabilities that are visible to bystanders, whereas others may be invisible. People experience disability in different ways and to different degrees, and some people may have multiple disabilities.

The NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014 defines disability as: "[The] long-term physical, psychiatric, intellectual or sensory impairment that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the person's full and effective participation in the community on an equal basis with others."

Some types of disability are:

- Sensory and speech
- Physical restriction
- Intellectual
- Acquired brain injury
- Psychological
- Visual impairment
- Neurodiversity
- Others including disease and auto-immune conditions

An aim of this plan is to understand the particular needs of different disability groups so that we can reduce barriers they face to inclusion and support them to live the life they want.

Explaining the Social and Human Rights Model of Disability

This Disability Inclusion Action Plan is guided by two complementary ways of understanding disability: **the social model** and **the human rights model.**

The Social Model

The social model understands disability as something created by the barriers people face in society, rather than by a person's medical condition or diagnosis. These barriers can include inaccessible physical infrastructure, negative or uninformed attitudes, and laws or policies that do not account for the needs of people with disability. This model has historical significance in disability advocacy and helps to form the basis of our modern understanding of disability.

The Human Rights Model

The human rights model recognises that people with disability have the same fundamental rights and inherent dignity as everyone else. It values disability as a natural part of human diversity and creates a framework for government to protect and promote the rights of disability through the decisions we make and services we provide. This model is used by international and national agencies and helps to form the basis of governmental disability policy.

Using these models together allows Shellharbour City Council to identify and understand the barriers that people with disability face in our community, and to take meaningful action to remove them.

Person working behind the counter of Greenacres Cafe at Shellharbour Airport

Background of the Disability Inclusion Action Plan

Where we started

This Disability Inclusion Action Plan is a pillar in Shellharbour City Council's vision to be a city that can be lived in, worked in and played in by everyone equally.

This plan meets the legislative requirements of the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 and the Disability Inclusion Amendment Act 2022, as well as adhering to our Community Strategic Plan (2025-2035) social sustainability guiding principle of fostering "cohesive, inclusive and diverse communities by delivering services and programs that enhance health and wellbeing, safety and connectivity now and into the future." (Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035 p. 18)

This plan was also developed to meet our obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability, to align with the Australian National Disability Strategy, and with the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan is created around a series of actions designed to actively address barriers faced by people with disability. These actions build on previous plans and outline how we will continue to improve inclusion for people with disability to physical and social infrastructure and services, as well as advocating for improvements across the Shellharbour area.

By developing this plan through consultation with people and groups that disability policy affects, it allows us to create actions that have the intended impact on our community. These consultations included meeting, talking to, and hearing feedback from people with disability, people with caring responsibilities, local disability service providers, disability representatives, advocacy organisations, community groups, the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, the broader community, and Council staff.

Under the Disability Inclusion Amendment Act 2022, a formal review of this plan is required by 30 June 2030, with the new plan in place within 12 months of the review (by 30 June 2031).

Child smiling and using an accessible swing at Red Lamp Playground in Lake Illawarra

Progress so far

Many substantial achievements were made in line with the actions we committed to in the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026. Below is a snapshot under the focus areas:

Focus Area 1: Developing positive community attitudes and behaviours

- Hosted, promoted and supported a range of events celebrating International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD), including the '2023 Shellharbour Summer Fair' and the '2025 IDPWD Shellharbour Family Fun Day'
- Held community engagement sessions to seek feedback on accessible and inclusive events and public infrastructure and implemented changes to reflect feedback
- Accessible public amenities are listed on external sources such as the National Public Toilet Map, and all accessible toilets are fitted with a Master Locksmiths Access Key (MLAK), allowing eligible individuals to access them outside of regular hours

Focus Area 2: Creating accessible, liveable communities

- Reviewed 522 land use planning projects from an access and inclusion perspective between July 2023 and September 2025 and provided recommendations for improvement
- Included access and inclusion in the scope, design and implementation process of most public spaces and facilities renewal programs, upgrades, and new capital projects
- Upgraded the Beverley Whitfield Ocean Pool to include an accessibility ramp and an aquatic wheelchair, and two of our local beaches have accessible walkway matting and aquatic wheelchairs available for community use
- Four local parks were fenced to provide safe, more secure play spaces that support access and inclusion for people with disability and their families

Focus Area 3: Supporting access to meaningful employment

- Partnered with a local social enterprise to deliver a 10-week program supporting young people who identify as First Nations and as living with disability that fostered cultural connection, skill development, and community engagement
- Council strengthened our Procurement Policy to include specific consideration of social and sustainability outcomes in our procurement processes
- Council engaged a disability-focused social enterprise to operate the café at Shellharbour Airport, supporting inclusive employment opportunities for people with disability

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

- Linked 26 planning documents in the Community Strategic Plan to our Disability Access and Inclusion Plan
- Developed Easy Read strategies for the creation of accessible documents, including the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026 and the Community Facilities Strategy

Council's Role

While creating an accessible and inclusive environment involves all of the Shellharbour community, we have specific roles in implementing the actions that will make it happen. These roles include being a:

Provider

Provider of accessible and inclusive facilities and services that make Shellharbour a place where everyone can thrive

Strategic Planner

Strategic planner to ensure that the city meets the changing needs and expectations of our community

Capacity Builder

Capacity builder, to provide education, development opportunities, and policy frameworks to create knowledge and resources that are embedded in the community, and advocate on behalf of community

Regulator

Regulator, to monitor compliance with legislation

Collaborator

Collaborator, to work with community organisations and other levels of government to deliver benefits to our community

Two women, one who is using a wheelchair, in front of Beverley Whitfield Pool in Shellharbour Village

Legislative and Policy Framework

An Inclusive NSW

International

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD)

Australian Government

Disability Discrimination Act 1992

Australian Disability Strategy 2021-2031 (ADS)

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

New South Wales Government

Disability Inclusion Act 2014

Disability Inclusion Amendment Act 2022

NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2026-2029

Shellharbour City Council

Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035

Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2026-2030

Diagram explaining the different layers of legislative and policy Frameworks that impact disability.

Woman providing Auslan interpreting at the Shellharbour Carols by Candlelight event

Disability in Australia

The Context and Case for Inclusion

21.4%
(5.5 million)
of Australians
live with a disability

52.3%
of Australians over
65 live with a disability

87.4%
Almost
(4.8 million)
people with disability had a limitation with at least one of the core activities of **communication, mobility** or **self-care,** and/or a **schooling** or **employment restriction**

19.7%
of people with disability aged 15 years and over had a bachelor's degree or above

54.2%
(3 million)
of people with disability used aids or equipment because of their condition

60.5%
(3.2 million)
people with disability need assistance with at least one activity of daily life

11.4%
of people with disability said they had experienced at least one form of abuse or neglect in the last 12 months*

**It is important to note that the questions about abuse and neglect were voluntary, and up to a third of respondents chose not to answer some or all of these questions. Those who preferred not to answer the questions are still included in the total population denominator used to calculate the proportions presented in this analysis.*

34.7%
of people with disability **aged 15 years and over avoided situations** because of their disability in the previous 12 months

Infographic displaying statistics about disability in Australia

Disability in Shellharbour

The Local Context

The Shellharbour Local Government Area is home to a diverse community. This diversity is reflected by those in our community who live with disability, as well as those who care for, live with, and work with people who live with disability. As a city that aims to lead by example, our goal is to create an accessible and inclusive physical, social, and legislative environment for all members of our community.

In 2021 5,392 (or 7.1% of the population) in Shellharbour City reported needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability. This has slightly increased from 6.7% in 2016.

The rate in Australia is

5.8%

The rate in NSW is

5.8%

In Shellharbour City, 8,342 carers were providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long-term illness or old age in 2021. This represents 13.5% of the population aged 15+.

The rate in Australia is

11.9%

The rate in NSW is

11.5%

Rate of people on low income

82.5% People with disability | **41.4%** General population of Shellharbour

Rate of unemployment

11.5% People with disability | **4.2%** General population of Shellharbour

Rate of education

Completed year 12

21.6% People with disability | **43.3%** General population of Shellharbour

Rate of people in social housing

15.7% People with disability | **4.5%** General population of Shellharbour

Rate of people with no motor vehicle

10% People with disability | **2.2%** General population of Shellharbour

Infographic displaying statistics about disability in Shellharbour

What the Community Has Told Us

For several months prior to creating this plan, we organised and participated in a range of community engagement activities about disability, access, and inclusion. Each engagement was designed to understand the community's thoughts and ideas on the four focus areas of this Disability Inclusion Action Plan.

As well as opening engagements to all of community, we also sought feedback directly from people with disability; service providers for people with disability; children; Aboriginal communities; people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds; and LGBTIQ+ communities, consistent with the targeted consultation requirements of the NSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan guidelines.

98

Feedback responses from community and service providers

304

Let's chat page views

82

Clicks from Snapshot eNewsletter

38

People attended drop-in sessions

22,001

People reached on social media

Statistics from the engagement

"The Shellharbour council is a very inclusive council"

"The disability community is growing and fast, council needs to look at what is already in place and upgrade and increase what is there."

"I love seeing the outcomes of changes made to Shellharbour LGA to ensure people with accessible needs are being recognised. The upgrades to the Shellharbour pool should be applauded."

Action Plan

Focus Area 1: Developing positive community attitudes and upholding the rights of people with disability

1.1 Deliver initiatives that foster positive attitudes towards people with disability

1.1.1 Continue to deliver and support initiatives that celebrate diversity and inclusion for people with disability, including International Day of People with Disability

1.1.2 Collaborate with other key stakeholders to celebrate and enhance access and inclusion in Shellharbour

1.1.3 Provide positive and inclusive representations of people with disability through images in publications, digital platforms and media channels

1.1.4 Explore and respond to the specific support and service requirements of LGBTQI+ people with disability

1.1.5 Continue to explore and respond to the specific needs of other groups living with disability including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and women

1.2 Deliver initiatives that aim to uphold the rights of people with disability

1.2.1 Provide specialist disability training to upskill key sections across Council in areas such as inclusive and accessible communications, built environments, services, events and programs

1.2.2 Provide up-to-date accessible and inclusive information in a number of formats to enhance understanding of programs, events and services available

1.2.3 Provide opportunities for people with disability to participate in community engagement initiatives and civic participation functions

Focus Area 2: Creating liveable and safer communities

2.1 Deliver initiatives that enhance liveability for people with disability

2.1.1 Continue to prioritise access and inclusion considerations in land use planning and in the delivery of capital works programs and events

2.1.2 Continue to engage with the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee and other relevant stakeholders on key land use planning and infrastructure projects

2.1.3 Continue to apply for grant funding to support initiatives and capital works projects that improve access and inclusion for people with disability

2.1.4 Deliver a range of social and recreational activities that meet the needs of people living with disability

2.1.5 Continue to advocate for access and inclusion improvements in non-Council places, spaces and services

2.2 Deliver initiatives that enhance safety for people with disability

2.2.1 Develop disaster preparedness and climate adaptation initiatives that empower people with disability to be prepared for and respond to emergencies and disasters

2.2.2 Continue to embed Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in land use planning and in the delivery of capital works programs, events and non-Council projects, with focus on improving safety for people with disability

Action Plan

Focus Area 3: Supporting access to meaningful employment and independence

3.1 Strengthen disability inclusive employment practices at Council

3.1.1 Deliver disability inclusion awareness induction / training for all Council staff

3.1.2 Explore opportunities to improve employment outcomes for Council employees with disabilities

3.1.3 Explore opportunities to create better employment pathways for people with disability seeking employment at Council

3.2 Strengthen disability inclusive employment capabilities in other organisations (non-Council)

3.2.1 Educate and advocate to local businesses and organisations on how they can become more inclusive to employees with disability

3.2.2 Work with and support organisations to deliver and promote initiatives that advance independence, inclusion, and participation across the City

3.3. Continue to implement Council's procurement practices to support disability inclusive employment and support disability-led businesses in the community

3.3.1 Strengthen social procurement opportunities by building relationships with disability-led organisations and businesses and promoting their use across Council

3.3.2 Explore opportunities to enhance disability employment through Council's social procurement practices

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

4.1. Improve awareness of Council's inclusive facilities and services

4.1.1 Develop and deliver a marketing campaign to promote Council's inclusive facilities, services, and events

4.1.2 Ensure Council's inclusive facilities are promoted and listed on external sites e.g. National Public Toilet Map

4.2. Ensure access and inclusion are key considerations in Council's functions

4.2.1 Review relevant new and existing policies and procedures to ensure they support equitable access and inclusion for people with disability

4.2.2 Implement a rights-based approach across all Council functions, upholding the rights of people with disability to access services, information, and decision-making on an equal basis

4.3. Strengthen Council's systems for reporting, responding to, and monitoring access issues

4.3.1 Improve and educate community on the process for reporting access issues to ensure they are investigated and actioned appropriately

4.4. Provide accessible and inclusive information and communication.

4.4.1 Develop accessible guidelines for communication and marketing and ensure all Council documents comply with these guidelines to provide equal access to information

4.4.2 Investigate opportunities to further improve on the experience of people with disability interacting with Council services

Where to From Here

Implementing this plan

An internal Implementation Plan has been developed that lists the priorities for Council over the next four years. This plan has been set out to match actions across the four focus areas and will be incorporated into our Delivery Program and Operational Plan, making all staff responsible for the delivery of these actions.

The DAIAC will be consulted on the implementation, progress and evaluation of the plan. The annual progress report will be discussed with the DAIAC. Where appropriate, we will consult with other groups and stakeholders representing people with disability.

Regular engagement will occur with stakeholders, community and staff to monitor whether these actions are still priorities. The actions may change in response to the changing needs of the community and other factors.

Monitoring and evaluating this plan

The Disability Inclusion Action Plan will be monitored and evaluated through the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework and reported on specifically through the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

A range of evaluation measures will be used to gauge performance on the actions committed to in this plan and will include outcomes and measures, including:

- A summary of what has been delivered
- Participant surveys
- Indicator changes
- Community and stakeholder feedback
- Evidence of policy and process changes

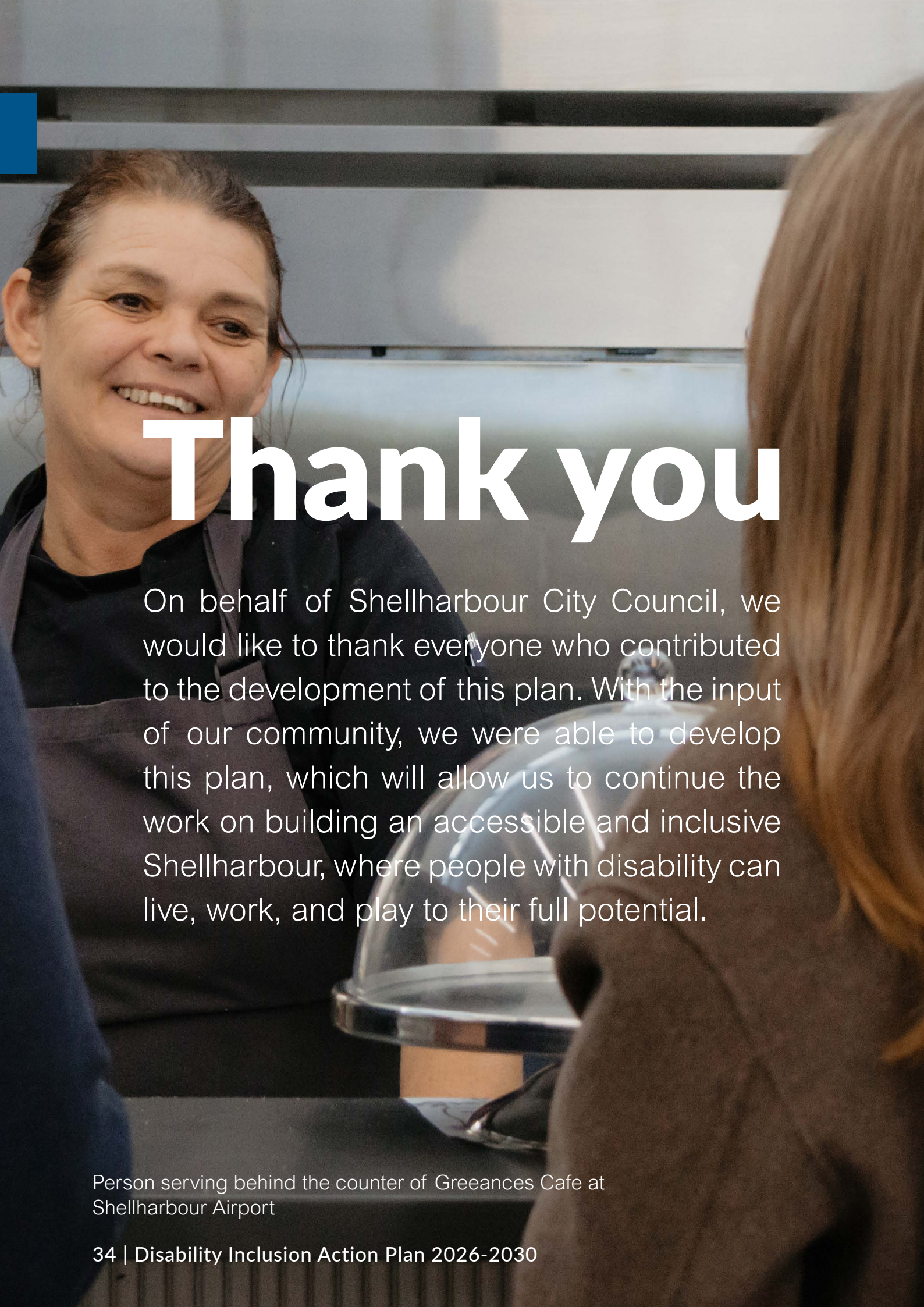
How is this plan funded?

Many actions committed to in this plan will be provided or upgraded as part of our usual business and managed as part of the long-term financial management plan.

Some actions may require support from external funding bodies to be carried out.

Where actions identified in this plan are not considered part of Council's core business, or there is shared responsibility for the items, Council will explore opportunities for external providers to deliver these services.

Smiling child looking directly at the camera, wearing headphones and a Hidden Disability sunflower lanyard at Shellharbour Airport



Thank you

On behalf of Shellharbour City Council, we would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of this plan. With the input of our community, we were able to develop this plan, which will allow us to continue the work on building an accessible and inclusive Shellharbour, where people with disability can live, work, and play to their full potential.

Person serving behind the counter of Greeances Cafe at Shellharbour Airport

Reference List

Australian Bureau of Statistics 2024, Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2022 | Australian Bureau of Statistics, www.abs.gov.au.

Australian Government 1992, Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

- 2002, Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002.
- 2010, Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010.

Disability Gateway 2026, Language and definitions | Disability Gateway, Disabilitygateway.gov.au

Informed Decisions 2026, Community profile, profile.id.com.au.

Lawson, A & Beckett, AE 2020, 'The social and human rights models of disability: Towards a complementarity thesis', The International Journal of Human Rights, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 348–379.

NSW Government 1993, Local Government Act 1993.

- 2014, Disability Inclusion Act 2014.
- 2021, Local Government (General) Regulation 2021.
- 2023, Disability Inclusion Action Planning NSW Guidelines, Communities & Justice.

Shellharbour City Council 2023, Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026: An Inclusive City.

Shellharbour City Council
Dharawal Country
76 Cygnet Avenue, Shellharbour City Centre NSW 2529

Telephone: (02) 4221 6111
Email: council@shellharbour.nsw.gov.au

shellharbour.nsw.gov.au

Women performing a dance routine on stage at the Shellharbour City Carols event