



Access Inclusion Standing Committee Annual Report 2025

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From the Co-Chairs

The City of Newcastle's (CN) Access Inclusion Standing Committee (AISC) is comprised of community, sector stakeholder, and Councillor members with lived experience of disability. The AISC was established under the commitment of the elected Council to integrating meaningful representation and voice in advancing the strategic priorities and actions of the City of Newcastle's *Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP 2022-2026)*.

We are pleased to take this opportunity to reflect on the achievements and role of the AISC in the decisions that shape access, inclusion, and participation in everyday civic life in this city, as we head into 2026, and the next *CN DIAP* revision.

We are proud to witness inclusive attitudes being embedded in the fabric of the city as well as in organisational systems and processes. In 2025 the AISC advised on initiatives ranging from recreation, sports, events, venues, tourism, playgrounds, public space, major works, committee systems, procurement, organisational practices, policy, and customer experience. Through this work the AISC continued to drive strategic priority to ensure city projects and services are representative of and inclusive for people with disability.

In 2025 the AISC saw increased internal applications from CN staff seeking to gain increased understanding of the opportunities and barriers that may be experienced by people with disability. This discernible shift is a sign of the structures established by CN to ensure accessibility in planning, review, and implementation right from the origins of city projects. We commend the important internal role of the CN Access Network, and which the AISC maintains strong ties with, for driving inclusive attitudes and behaviours.

These moves are in no small part due to the contributions made by the former Access Inclusion Advisory Committee (AIAC) in previous Council terms. We thank each AIAC member, and particularly former Councillor Margaret Wood as Co-Chair (2022-2024) and community representative (2017-2021), for their contributions to building more just, accessible and inclusive communities in this city.

We extend our sincere thanks to every Committee member, for their commitment and contributions. We acknowledge the contributions of our member Sinead Francis-Coan who tragically died in June. Her heart for just and inclusive communities was clear in her actions as Councillor and will continue to make lasting impact.

This is not easy work. As the findings of the 2019-2023 Australian *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* reaffirmed, long-established norms and structures have acted to marginalise, disadvantage, and suppress the rights of many people. The AISC continues to prioritise these necessary, challenging, and sometimes difficult, conversations. We thank each Committee member and guests and staff for approaching these discussions with openness, commitment, and safety.

As head into 2026, we thank the administrative and subject matter expert CN staff who support the AISC for generously sharing their time, passion, and expertise. Together we remain committed to continuing to building a city that prioritises access, social inclusion and overcoming discriminatory impediments and where the human rights, contribution, and diversity of all people with disability are recognised, respected and celebrated with pride.

Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk
Councillor Co-Chair

Eliot Shaw
Community Co-Chair

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Membership

Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk	– Councillor representative (Co-Chair)
Cr Sinead Francis-Coan	– Councillor representative
Cr Mark Brooker	– Councillor representative
Cr Siobhan Isherwood	– Councillor representative
Corey Balfourt	– Stakeholder representative (Castle)
Claire Bertholli	– Community representative
Belinda Burford	– Community representative
Naomi Curry	– Stakeholder representative (CDAH)
Dominic Freestone	– Stakeholder representative (Life Without Barriers)
Amanda Gardiner	– Community representative
Eliot Shaw	– Community representative (Co-Chair 2025-26)

Objective of the Standing Committee

To provide advice and guidance in the application of planning instruments that prioritise access, social inclusion and overcoming discriminatory impediments to promote a highly accessible, inclusive and welcoming community that respects independence and human dignity.

Summary of key items of business considered

4 March 2025

- Handover and welcome – thank you to former Committee members and welcome to new Committee members
- Committee Governance, Terms of Reference, Community and Stakeholder Obligations and CN Committees Guidelines
- Introduction to *CN Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)*
- Achievements over the past term, Foreshore Park inclusive play space design, *CN Walking and Mobility Plan*
- Setting forward Agenda for year and term ahead
- General Business (Customer Requests, Accessibility network, Travel & Parking, Community Grants)

13 May 2025

- *Delivering Newcastle 2024* – CN Delivery Program and Operational Plan
- Draft Civic Precinct Public Domain Plan
- Draft Camp Shortland
- *Delivering Newcastle 2024* - CN Delivery Program and Operational Plan
- Survey Feedback from Committee Member Input and Discussion of Committee members feedback on key areas of priority
- Appointment of Co-Chairperson
- General Business (Neighbourly Newy, Count Us In ethic, CN stall at recent Hunter Disability Expo)

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2 September 2025

- Acknowledging the passing and contribution of Cr Sinead Francis-Coan
- Welcome to Cr Siobhan Isherwood
- CN Arts, Culture, and Creativity Panel – presentation and feedback with CN panel reps
 - Art Gallery
 - Civic Precinct (City Hall, Civic Theatre)
 - Museum, Archives, Libraries and Learning (MALL)
 - Media Engagement, Economy and Corporate Affairs (MEECA)
- *Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)* – the role and obligations of local government
- Procurement – CN Policy update and Royal Commission recommendations
- General Business (public exhibition of Queens Wharf Upgrade, Lambton Pool Access Improvements)

27 November 2025

- Foreshore Park Inclusive Play Space – Wayfinding signage
- Planning for *Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2026–2029*
- Update – Accessible Tourism Audit
- Draft *CN Local Streets Plan*
- Appointment of representatives to Newcastle Ocean Baths Community Reference Group (CRG)
- General Business (City of Newcastle Inclusion, Diversity and Equity approach and staff recognition)
- International Day of People with Disability (IDPWD) 2025 – Committee, CN Access Network, and sector stakeholders afternoon tea

Summary of key achievements

CN values the work and commitment of the AISC members who provide their time to share their knowledge, skills and experience which in turn shapes and informs CN projects and informs the decision making of the Council. Outlined below is a summary of the city-wide projects, services, programmes, organisational operations, and advocacy which have been discussed at meetings across 2025.

Establishment of the 2025-28 Committee Term

In 2025 the Access Inclusion Standing Committee commenced its new term, welcoming new members through an inclusive, strengths-based onboarding process. This included time for sharing motivations for joining the Committee and hopes for the terms, overview of CN Committees governance policies, and AISC-specific governance frameworks including the model of lived experience Co-Chairs to embed empowered leadership in the Committee's operations and governance.

An invitation was extended to former Committee members to join with incoming members for the inaugural meeting and lunch. This provided space for committee members, past and present, to connect and share, establish continuity of governance, and recognise the influence successive Committees have had on City of Newcastle projects and service planning, and internal and external attitudinal change.

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In 2025 we recognise the growing community empowerment and engagement in accessible and inclusive city planning. In establishing the AISC for this Term we saw strong interest in community members seeking to join the Committee, with the number of applications noted as the highest to date and the most received to any City of Newcastle Strategic Advisory or Standing Committee. In celebration of this, and in recognition of the value of having broad voices with lived experience of disability represented on the AISC, the choice was made to appoint an additional community member for the 2025-28 Term.

Strengthening DIAP and Committee Alignment

In its first meetings in 2025 the AISC was introduced to the City of Newcastle's *Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP)* and received a briefing on how the *CN Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) 2022-26* sits within the *Newcastle 2040 Community Strategic Plan* framework and the associated regulatory obligations of the City of Newcastle.

Members considered the approach to reviewing the implementation of actions in the *2022-26 DIAP*, opportunities to directly influence priority actions in the upcoming *CN DIAP* update, and identifying the roles and responsibilities of local (and state and national) government. Members also considered the application of the CN Committee Guidelines, Code of Conduct, Media Policy, and forward agenda planning, in order to establish processes to support ethical, transparent, and safe engagement with internal and external stakeholders, CN staff, community members, and each other.

This foundational work ensured that community members would have the frameworks to meaningfully and thoughtfully contribute across the 2025-28 AISC Term, and be able to better understand and action avenues to collectively advance the priorities of the DIAP, as well as advise on how City of Newcastle's projects, services, and infrastructure may best respond to and accommodate the needs of people with disability.

Accessibility of Arts, Cultural & Community Events and Venues

Early in 2025 the Committee members workshopped priority focus areas for the upcoming year and Term, with arts and culture one key area identified. For the September AISC meeting a panel session and workshop was convened with City of Newcastle staff from Major Events, Museum, Libraries & Learning, the Civic Theatre, and Newcastle Art Gallery represented, to discuss existing and future accessibility initiatives and improvements across key City of Newcastle community, arts, and cultural assets.

Key highlights in the City implemented in recent years to shift attitudes and normalise universal access include staff training, an accessibility in tourism audit of city-centre businesses, the introduction of sensory spaces and audio-described elements into community New Year's Eve events, AUSLAN-integrated childcare programs and inclusive Library refurbishments, low-sensory activations and accessible exhibition design at the refurbished Art Gallery, and improved hearing loop systems, wheelchair-accessible booking processes, and accessible performance programming at the Civic Theatre. These initiatives together demonstrate further progress toward increasing accessibility of arts, cultural, and community events and venues.

This session affirmed City of Newcastle's commitment to continual improvement. With the Committee, staff workshopped any further systemic barriers experienced by people with disability in accessing arts and cultural spaces in the city; discussing accessibility in third-party events in Civic venues, technology and booking processes and challenges experienced by artists and audience members living with disability, informing the identification of areas and opportunities for further policy refinement, systems improvements, organisational leadership, or external advocacy to further strengthen accessibility.

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Celebrating City leadership and connections

International Day of People with Disability (3 December) is an opportunity to recognise the leadership, creativity, and contributions of people with lived experience of disability to our communities. Following the December 2025 AISC meeting, the Access Inclusion Standing Committee invited external sector stakeholders and the CN Access Network to join for a lunch to recognise IDPWD 2025 and strengthen ties between the AISC, and internal and external champions. As well as taking the time to celebrate progress, affirm community partnerships, and deepen the collective commitment to advancing accessibility and inclusion across Newcastle, the event also gave an opportunity for current Committee members to see how their advice translates into change inside and outside of the organisation.

The tangible impacts of the work undertaken within the City of Newcastle in recent years including the constitution of the CN Access Network and appointment of staff champions to support the implementation of its Inclusion Diversity and Equity (IDE) Strategy (which was informed by the former term of the AIAC), was also recognised in celebrating being named an Inclusive Employer by Diversity Council Australia for leadership in equitable workplaces. This national recognition is testament to the organisation and staff who champion leadership everyday in behaviour and practice to ensure independence, dignity and respect for every worker.

Embedding Lived-Experience

In establishing the new term in 2025, the Committee re-established its commitment to a chairing model of pairing with an elected Councillor with a community representative to co-chair the Committee. The Committee decided to share this opportunity between different community members for each of the years 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28. This structure will ensure co-design of the committee's agenda and focus, and across the AISC Term will see a diversity of lived experience across will directly shape meeting agendas and practice.

This approach reinforces the value of community leadership and representative governance, and strengthens the connection of the role of the AISC in recognising the long-term vision of the DIAP. It is also a governance structure that is unique to this committee in all of the City of Newcastle Committees, and one which has been adopted in the belief that emplacing community expertise squarely in shared governance is a commitment to member, community, and organisational accountability through modelling inclusivity and accessibility – not only in ensuring *representation* of voices but embedding those voices in decision-making *practice*.

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Summary of performance and governance

Date of Meeting	Quorum achieved	Members in attendance	Agenda circulated to members and published on CN's website	Declaration of conflicts of interest listed as agenda item	Minutes circulated to members, adopted by the committee and published on CN's website
4 March	Quorate	<p>Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk Councillor (Co-Chair) Cr Mark Brooker Councillor Cr Sinead Francis-Coan Councillor Corey Balfourt Castle Naomi Curry CDAH Dominic Freestone Life Without Barriers Belinda Burford Community Representative Claire Bertholli Community Representative Amanda Robertson Community Representative Eliot Shaw Community Representative (Co-Chair)</p> <p><i>AISC Governance</i> Lynn Duffy Executive Manager Community & Recreation, CN (Facilitator)</p> <p><i>Visitors</i> Stephen Warham Community Development Facilitator, CN Lisa Davis Social Planner, CN Tanya Marmara Community and Recreation Operations Officer (Secretary)</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes
13 May	Quorate	<p>Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk Councillor (Co-Chair) Cr Mark Brooker Councillor Cr Sinead Francis-Coan Councillor Corey Balfourt Castle Naomi Curry CDAH Belinda Burford Community Representative Claire Bertholli Community Representative Amanda Robertson Community Representative Eliot Shaw Community Representative (Co-Chair)</p> <p><i>AISC Governance</i> Lynn Duffy Executive Manager Community & Recreation, CN (Facilitator) Petria Jukes Community Planning & Development Manager, CN Tanya Marmara Community and Recreation Operations Officer (Secretary)</p> <p><i>Visitors</i> Tim Daley Senior Project Planner (CN) Linda Yeo Corporate Planning & Performance Lead (CN)</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes

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2 Sept	Quorate	<p>Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk Councillor (Co-Chair) Cr Mark Brooker Councillor Cr Siobhan Isherwood Councillor Dominic Freestone Life Without Barriers Claire Bertholli Community Representative Naomi Curry CDAH Amanda Robertson Community Representative Eliot Shaw Community Representative (Co-Chair)</p> <p><i>AISC Governance</i> Lynn Duffy Executive Manager Community & Recreation, CN (Facilitator) Petria Jukes Community Planning & Development Manager, CN Tanya Marmara CN Community and Recreation Operations Officer (Secretary)</p> <p><i>Visitors</i> Julie Baird Director Museum Archive Libraries & Learning (CN) Nick Kaiser Executive Manager Media Engagement Economy & Corporate Affairs (CN) Zana Kobayashi Art Gallery Audience Lead (CN) Jo Michel Civic Theatre Visitor Services Lead (CN)</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes
27 Nov	Quorate	<p>Cr Dr Elizabeth Adamczyk Councillor (Co-Chair) Cr Mark Brooker Councillor Cr Siobhan Isherwood Councillor Dominic Freestone Life Without Barriers Claire Bertholli Community Representative Naomi Curry CDAH Amanda Robertson Community Representative Eliot Shaw Community Representative (Co-Chair)</p> <p><i>AISC Governance</i> Lynn Duffy Executive Manager Community & Recreation, CN (Facilitator) Petria Jukes Community Planning & Development Manager, CN Tanya Marmara CN Community and Recreation Operations Officer (Secretary)</p> <p><i>Visitors</i> Michael Cavanagh Project Manager, CN Rachel Evans Project Manager, CN Lisa Davis Social Planner, CN Georgina Lazzari Destination & Economy Manager, CN Ryan Tranter Executive Manager, Transport & Regulation, CN</p>	Yes	Yes	Yes

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