

SHIRE OF MERREDIN ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN 2015 - 2020



- This DAIP furthers the principles and objectives of the *Western Australian Disability Services Act 1993*
- Meets the seven Standards in Schedule 2 of the Disability Services Regulations 2004
- Adopted for public comment by the Shire of Merredin on 19 May 2015
- This is also available in CD, large print and in electronic format on Council's website; www.merredin.wa.gov.au

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 The Shire of Merredin

The Shire of Merredin is located in the Central East Region of Western Australia, 260km from Perth. The Shire covers 3372km².

The Shire has a population of 3,246, of which a town population of approximately 2,900. The remaining population resides in the rural area and from the townsites of Muntadgin, Burracoppin, Nangeenan and Hines Hill.

There are 1,340 dwellings within the Shire of Merredin.

Major Industries include steel fabrication, machinery manufacturing, wheat, sheep, pigs, Collgar Wind Farm and China Southern Western Australian Flying College. Because of its position, roughly halfway between Perth and Kalgoorlie and having major marshalling yards to handle both narrow gauge and standard gauge, Merredin appears to have a solid future associated with the transport industry. It is important that Merredin continues to promote its reputation as a town offering low cost housing in a rural location with a high quality standard of living.

In 2001, 2005 & 2014 the Disability Services Commission, Shire of Merredin, Occupational Therapists from Wheatbelt Country Health Services and community members of Merredin conducted an access walk of the town. As a result of the walks

- 9 government departments and community based organisations received letters requesting improved access and/or signage;
- 16 businesses received letters requesting better access with suggestions on how to accommodate;
- The Shire of Merredin received a list with requests to be prioritized by the Executive Manager Engineering Services when funds are available; and
- 8 businesses receive letters of thanks for their excellent access and good business practices.

Outcomes from the 2005 access walk were all banks provided access to premise for people with disability and removed impediments to use of their ATM's including lowering and audio assistance, various shops have had major overhauls of access as well as the provision of accessible isles, Health Services installed self-opening doors, and the Shire installed a self opening door at the Merredin Medical Centre and relocated the accessible parking bay in Bates Street to a more suitable location.

The 2014 audit concentrated on access to the recently completed centralized Education precinct and resulted in recommendations to the relevant Department on improving access to the precinct.

1.2 Functions, facilities and services (both in-house and contracted): -

The Shire of Merredin provides:

Services to property: Construction and maintenance of Shire-owned buildings, roads, footpaths, cycle facilities and walk trails; land drainage and development; waste collection and disposal; litter control and street cleaning; planting and caring for street trees; street lighting and bushfire control.

Services to the community including: Provision and maintenance of playing areas and reserves and management of Merredin Recreation Community Leisure Centre; library and information services; environmental health services; senior citizen care; Medical Centre; Cummins Theatre; Visitors Centre and health education.

Regulatory services including: Planning of roads and subdivisions of land in accordance with the Local Planning Scheme; issuing of building permit approvals for construction, additions and alterations now include provision of access, environmental health and ranger services including enforcement of local laws.

General Administration: The provision of general information to the public and lodging of complaints and payments of rates.

Processes of government including: Ordinary and Special Council and committee meetings, electors meetings and election of Council members.

Philosophical Statement: The Shire of Merredin has been recognised for working closely with the community to achieve outcomes which the majority of the population has requested for the people living within its boundaries and for its efforts in developing the town as a cohesive community.

It is the Shire's intentions to create the right balance between recognising the individual and collective needs of people with disability and the implementation of the service plans insofar as it is economically possible within the timeframes. To achieve this, the Shire has given a commitment to consult with all residents including people with disability on planning and to keep everyone informed of Council's deliberations on all matters.

Council recognises the rights of people with disability which are free of discrimination.

1.3 People with disability in the Shire of Merredin

The population of people with a disability within the Shire using Australian Bureau of Statistics data is estimated at 900. This does not comply with local estimates from sources such as families, health professionals, community workers and representatives of community organisations. The anecdotal local estimate of people with disability residing within the shire is in the vicinity of 300 to 400. The uncertainty and lack of reliable data indicates the need for substantial research to be undertaken in this area. The influx of retirees will increase this number and seasonal arrival of tourists, including tourists with a disability, must be considered.

1.4 Planning for better access

The Western Australian Disability Services Act requires all Local Governments to develop and implement an Access and Inclusion Plan (AIP) to ensure that people with disability have equal access to facilities and services.

Other legislation underpinning access and inclusion includes the Western Australia Equal Opportunity Act (1984) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA), both of which make discrimination on the basis of a person's disability unlawful.

1.5 Progress since 1995

The Shire of Merredin is committed to facilitating the inclusion of people with disability through the improvement of access to its information and facilities and services. Towards this goal, the Shire has adopted its first Disability Access & Inclusion Plan in 1995 to address the access barriers within the community. The plan was again reviewed in 2001 and 2007.

In compiling the Access & Inclusion Plan in 2015, a number of facilities were recognised as already having been put in place by the Shire to assist people with disability who either reside in or visit the Shire. These facilities include upgrading of footpaths to provide low contour gradient disabled access, new ablution facilities and entries to the Memorial Swimming Pool, provision of a new Recreation Centre and the provision of additional concrete footpath surfaces as part of the Townscape Plan.

Since the adoption of the initial Disability Access & Inclusion Plan, the Shire has implemented a number of works and programs to improve disability access within the Shire of Merredin. These are as follows:

Improvement of existing functions, facilities and services to meet the needs of people with disability

- Talking books positioned in a clearly-designated and easily-accessible section of the library.

- A priority bin service is available on request to assist people who are unable to move their bin to kerb side.
- Have assisted in increasing disability access awareness of developers, and the introduction of disabled access to all newly-constructed or altered public buildings.

Improved access to community buildings and facilities

- Barrack Street was upgraded to provide access to all shops from the vehicle with smooth surfaces to the entry of shops.
- Provision of electronic door entry facilities at the Shire Administration, Medical centre, Library and Visitors Centre.
- Provision of a new Recreation Centre with heated hydrotherapy spa pool and provision of all disabled facilities including ramped access.
- Construction of a disabled ablution facility at the cemetery.
- Provision of a chair lift to the aquatic centre main pool and improvements to the facilities to address AS1428.
- Encouraged local businesses to improve disabled access to shops.
- Footpaths are replaced with 2m width dual purpose paths. Approximately 40% have been completed.
- Improved road/footpath entry with low gradient aprons.
- Provision of street front accessibility parking bays within the central business district - Barrack Street, Bates Street and Mitchell Street and other relevant areas such as the Seniors' Centre, Merredin Medical Centre, the local Disability Services Commission and other retail shops.

Opportunities provided for people with disability to participate in public consultations, grievance mechanisms and decision-making processes are provided

In October 2005 the Shire wrote to all families, community members, community groups and the Disability Services Commission and organised a walk the streets to raise the awareness of disability and to follow up on issues previously raised.

The outcome of the program was that: -

- 1) Local Banks improved access to their facilities;
- 2) Government buildings access was highlighted and the head Offices were to review and recommend changes. Access to the Post Office and Police Station have been improved.
- 3) Five businesses sought advice and inspections to allow for shop access improvements;
- 4) The remaining businesses were inspected and advice provided to improve access. It was noted that the majority of premises had reasonable access.
- 5) The Shire of Merredin improved access by: -

- Council services, functions and facilities are available on request in large print and computer disc alternative formats.
- Council ensures that voting for municipal elections takes place in accessible buildings and that alternative voting arrangements are available where required.
- Council services including minutes of meetings, dogs impounded and general information are available on the website.
- Introduced a mobile garbage bin collection service to persons in domestic properties that have mobility challenges;
- Engaged a Media & Communications Officer to implement alternate access to Council through computer and the general media;
- Provision of access and mobility areas to the Apex Park toilets; and
- Completed a new ablution block in the town centre including access and mobility areas and mothers change-room facilities;

A similar approach was taken for the 2007 review which progressed the outcomes above.

The Shire of Merredin has also budgeted within forward planning to: -

- a) Centralise access to Council services through improvements to the North Merredin Primary School and placement of certain community services areas of Council operations;
- b) Continue to provide sloped ramps to footpaths throughout the town of Merredin; and
- c) Commence an aged precinct within close proximity to the proposed North Merredin Primary School precinct including footpaths and improved access to Barrack Street shopping precinct.

2.0 ACCESS AND INCLUSION POLICY STATEMENT

The Shire of Merredin is committed to ensuring that the community is an accessible community for people with disability, their families and carers; via Council's;

- Progressive modification of all existing Public Building Facilities and Services under its control, to cater for the needs of people with disability. It should be noted that the public buildings under Council direct control have been addressed and this aspect is now care and maintenance challenges
- Ensuring that all future Public Buildings, Facilities and Services, constructed or provided within the Shire are designed to cater for the needs of the disabled. Council can only enforce the requirements on the private sector and state government projects are beyond Council control. There are no new public buildings proposed by Council

The Shire of Merredin believes that people with disability, their families and carers who live in country areas, should be supported to remain in the community of their choice;

recognising that people with disability are valued members of the community and contribute socially, economically, and culturally, making for a more diverse and richer community.

The Shire is committed to consulting with people with disability, their families and carers and, where required, disability organisations, to ensure that barriers to access are addressed appropriately.

The Shire of Merredin is committed to achieving the seven standards of its Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, which are as follows:

- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability have the same opportunities as others to access the services of, and any event organised by, the Shire of Merredin.
- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability have the same opportunities as others to access buildings and other facilities of the Shire of Merredin.
- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability receive information from the Shire in a format that will enable them to access information as readily as others are able to.
- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the staff of the Shire of Merredin.
- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability have the same opportunities as others to make complaints to the Shire of Merredin.
- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability have the same opportunities as others to participate in any public consultation with the Shire of Merredin.
- Provide a means of ensuring that people with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with a public authority.

3.0 STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE ACCESS AND INCLUSION

The Shire of Merredin is committed to achieving the following outcomes.

Outcome 1: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and participate in any events organised by, a public authority.

- Council will endeavour to be adaptable in responding to the barriers experienced by people with various disability, including people with physical, sensory, cognitive and psychiatric disabilities.
- Council will ensure that all policies and practices that govern the operation of Council facilities, functions and services are consistent with Council Policy regarding access.

Outcome 2: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access buildings and other facilities of a public authority.

- Council will undertake to incorporate the priorities regarding access for people with disability, identified during the consultations, into its submission for its capital works improvement program. Modifications will commence as funds are made available.
- Council will undertake to liaise with developers to increase their awareness of the access requirements of people with disability.

Outcome 3: People with disability receive information from a public authority in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.

- Council will produce all of its information on Council facilities, functions and services using clear and concise language. The advice provided electronically can be enlarged by font amendments and on request at the administration
- Council will advise the community that, upon request, information about Council functions, facilities and services can be made available in alternative formats, such as large print.

Outcome 4: People with disability receive the same level of service from the employees of a public authority as other people receive from the employees of that public authority.

- Council will undertake to ensure that staff is aware of the key access needs of residents with disability and people with disability who visit the local government area in relation to the provisions of all services.
- Where required, Council will seek expert advice from the disability field on how to meet the access needs of people with disability.

Outcome 5: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to a public authority.

- Council will ensure that all grievance mechanisms are accessible for people with disability and are acted upon.

Outcome 6: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by a public authority.

- Council will ensure that information is available in a clear and concise language on how residents can participate in decision-making processes, public consultation and grievance mechanisms.
- Council will undertake to support people with disability to attend Council

Meetings.

Outcome 7: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with a public authority.

- Continue to review recruitment practices to ensure all processes are inclusive.
- Work with local employment support providers to employ a person with a disability when positions are available.
- Provide regular disability awareness training for all staff;
- Undertake an audit of equipment and resources to identify any requirements to support staff with a temporary or permanent impairment.

4.0 DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACCESS AND INCLUSION PLAN (AIP)

4.1 Community consultation process

The Shire of Merredin reviewed its Access & Inclusion Plan in 2015. The process included:

- Examination of the previous DAIP and subsequent review of reports to determine what has been achieved and outstanding works.
- Examination of other Shire documents and strategies.
- Investigation of contemporary trends and good practice in access and inclusion.
- Consultation with staff.
- Consultation with the community.

The Disability Services Act Regulations (2004) set out minimum consultation requirements for public authorities in relation to AIP. Local governments may call for submissions (either general or specific) by notice in newspapers circulating in the Local Government area and on any website maintained by, or on behalf of, the Local Government. Other mechanisms may also be used. The following consultation methods were used:

- In May/June 2015 the community was informed through the local newspaper, radio and Shire website, that the Shire was developing an AIP to address access barriers for people with disability and their families. The community was invited to provide comment on the draft AIP.
- In May/June 2015 meeting with elected members of Council and Shire employees to discuss barriers that people with disability experience when accessing Shire

information, services and facilities and determine how to address these barriers.

- In May/June 2015 contacted key groups and support agencies within the Shire that are associated with people with disability and their families to discuss barriers and potential solutions and enhancing community inclusion.

4.1 Findings of the consultation

The review and consultation found that most of the initial objectives in the previous Disability Access & Inclusion Plan had been achieved or were ongoing and that a new plan was required to address ongoing access barriers, ensuring currency and relevance. The new plan should also reflect the legislative and regulatory changes, accommodating contemporary values and practices, whilst striving for inclusion and access beyond the minimum compliance of standards.

The only known statutory changes relate to access and mobility ablution units (Australian Standard 1428) and access to aged accommodation (R Codes 2013) which are enforced through the planning and building approval process via Council's Development Services section.

4.2 Responsibility for implementing the DAIP

Implementation of the DAIP is the responsibility of all areas of the Shire of Merredin. The Disability Services Act (1993) requires all public authorities to take all practical measures to ensure that the DAIP is implemented by its officers, employees, agents and contractors.

4.3 Communication of plan to staff and people with disability

In August 2015, copies of the Draft AIP were sent to all those who contributed to the planning process, including the Shire employees, people with disability, their families, carers, disability organisations and relevant community groups, for feedback. In September 2015, the plan was adopted in draft form. Formal endorsement by Council was December 2015.

The community has been advised through the local media (newspaper and radio) that copies of the plan are available to the community upon request and in alternative formats if required. A copy of the reviewed DAIP will be available on the Shires website.

As plans are amended, Shire employees and the community will be advised of the availability of updated plans, using the above methods.

4.4 Review and evaluation mechanisms

The Disability Service Act requires that AIP's be reviewed at least every five years. The AIP Implementation Plan can be amended more frequently to reflect advancements of access and inclusion issues. Whenever the AIP is amended, a copy of the amended plan must be lodged with the Disability Services Commission and following consultation procedures as

outlined in the Act.

Monitoring and reviewing: The DAIP will be reviewed annually for progress and implementation with all progress and recommended changes reported to Council.

Evaluation: An evaluation will occur as part of a five-yearly review of the DAIP. Community, staff and elected members will be consulted as part of the evaluation and Implementation Plans will be amended based on the feedback received. Copies of the amended Implementation Plan, once endorsed by Council, will be available to the community in alternative formats.

4.5 Reporting of DAIP

The Disability Services Act requires the Shire to report on the implementation of its AIP in its Annual Report outlining:

- Progress towards the desired outcomes of its DAIP.
- Progress of its agents and contractors towards meeting the seven desired outcomes.
- The strategies used to inform agents and contractors of its DAIP and what they were.

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The Implementation Plan details the task, timelines and responsibilities for each strategy to be implemented to progress the strategies of the DAIP.

It is intended that the Implementation Plan will be updated annually, as and when required, to progress the achievements of all the strategies over the duration of the five year plan.

Outcome 1:

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and participate in any events organised by, the Shire of Merredin:

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Ensure that people with disability are consulted on their need for services and the accessibility of current services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a feedback mechanism for use of all persons with a disability who use services by the Shire. • Provision of domestic refuse collection service from inside residential property boundaries available to persons with an access and mobility challenge 	2015 & ongoing	All Managers to review their Section and propose improvements
Monitor Shire services to ensure equitable access and inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct systematic review of accessibility of services • Rectify identified barriers 	Ongoing	Executive Manager of Development Services
Ensure that events, whether provided or funded, are accessible to people with disability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all events are planned using the Accessible Events Checklist. 	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive Officer & Executive Manager Development Services

Outcome 2:

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access buildings and other facilities of the Shire of Merredin

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Ensure that all buildings and facilities meet the Australian Standards for access and any demonstrated additional needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to address access barriers to Shire buildings and facilities. • Prioritise and make submission to Council to commence works on identified barriers. • Where required investigate public concerns regarding access to all buildings – private sector included for compliance and required upgrades. 	Ongoing	Executive Manager of Development Services
Ensure that all redevelopment works provide access to people with disability, where practicable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that upgrades of publicly accessed buildings provides for persons with disability. • Ensure no building application is signed off without meeting the legal requirements for access & inclusion. 	Ongoing	Executive Manager of Development Services
Ensure that ACROD parking meets the needs of people with disability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit existing Shire accessible parking bays and upgrade proposed with main street upgrade. Current bays not correctly sized due to legislative changes • Install additional accessible parking bays in town centre carpark when upgrade occurs 	2015 Ongoing	Executive Manager Of Engineering Services
Ensure accessible facilities and services are clearly indicated and accessible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgraded signage to facilities and services, including toilets and parking. • Ongoing upgrade of footpaths and ramps leading to disabled facilities and service. 	Ongoing	Executive Manager of Engineering Services & Executive Manager Development Services
Encourage local business and venues of the requirements and benefits of providing access for people with disability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide readily available information on the legal requirements and needs of people with disability. • Promote the benefits of providing access to people with disability. 	2014 & ongoing	Executive Manager of Development Services with assistance local DSC office

Outcome 3:

People with disability receive information from the Shire of Merredin in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Ensure that the community is aware that information is available in alternative formats on request.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise the availability of alternative formats in the local paper and radio. • Ensure all documents that require community consultation carry a notation that the document is available in alternative formats. • Maintain and regularly update the Webpage for continuity of documents and information 	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Improve employee awareness of information available in alternative formats.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train employees in providing accessible information and notation requirements. 	Ongoing	CEO/Managers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web access to public records available at www.merredin.wa.gov.au , Monthly newsletter – local newspaper, notice board, Facebook via Media and Communications Officer 	2015 & Ongoing	CEO

Outcome 4:

People with disability receive the same level of service from the employees of a public authority as other people receive from the employees of the Shire of Merredin

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Ensure that Council Members and employees are aware of access needs and can provide appropriate services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Council officers to have disability awareness training. The Disability Services Commission and relevant disability organisations to be contacted for assistance in the development of training. 	Ongoing	CEO & Senior Management Group
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of domestic refuse collection service from inside residential property boundaries available to persons with an access and mobility challenge 	2015	Executive Manager Development Services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of access to Council via Facebook and other media applications 	2014 & ongoing	CEO

Outcome 5:

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to the Shire of Merredin

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Ensure that grievance mechanisms are accessible for people with disability and are acted upon.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide alternative methods of making complaints, for example web-based forms.	Ongoing	D/CEO
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engagement of Media & Communications Officer	2014 & ongoing	CEO
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facebook access to Shire of Merredin	Ongoing	CEO

Outcome 6:

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by the Shire of Merredin

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Ensure that people with disability are actively consulted about the AIP and any other relevant planning processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with people with disability using a range of different mediums, for example, survey, interview, focus group. 	Ongoing	Deputy Chief Executive Officer & Executive Manager Development Services
Ensure that people with disability are aware of, and can access, other established consultative processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure all documents that require community consultation are available in alternative formats. 	Ongoing	CEO/Managers

Outcome 7:

People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with a public authority

Strategy	Task	Timeline	Responsibility
Use inclusive recruitment practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include Equal Employment Opportunity statement in the advert. For example “promotes a workplace that actively seeks to include, welcome and value unique contributions of all people. Encourages people with disability, Aboriginal Australians, young people and people from culturally diverse backgrounds to apply. • Ensure that positions for which persons with disability are advertised to the relevant public recruitment groups 	Ongoing	Chief Executive Officer & Senior Management Group
Awareness Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make provision for regular disability awareness training for all staff 	Ongoing	Senior Management Group
Supporting Equipment & Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an audit of equipment and resources 	Ongoing	Senior Management Team & OSH Committee

	<p>to identify any requirements to support staff with a temporary or permanent impairment;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan for any identified supporting equipment or resource	Ongoing	Senior Management
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NOTES

- Not all positions offered will suit a person with disability – e.g. a truck driver/grader operator requires a large degree of dexterity that is required to complete tasks.

END OF DOCUMENT

UPDATED September 2015

Greg Powell
Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Merredin