

Inclusive Banyule

Evaluation Report 2022-2025

Executive Summary

Inclusive Banyule 2022-2026 is a strategic plan aimed at fostering intentional inclusive practices through an intersectional, equity-focused approach. The Plan included three objectives:

1. Being an equitable and inclusive workplace and increasingly diverse workforce
2. Delivering equitable and inclusive service, places and spaces
3. Recognising and strengthening diverse communities and neighbourhood

Actions focus on:

- Addressing perceptions and attitudes
- Elevating visibility and awareness of diversity
- Identifying and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion
- Understanding the lived experience of people.

The actions were underpinned by a focus on learning and adaption, partnership and collaboration and focus.

Over the four-years, Inclusive Banyule will deliver 195 actions.

Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
# actions	% completed	# actions	% Completed	# actions	% Completed	# actions	% Completed
26	81%	70	94%	47	94%	52	TBC

Total actions delivered by population group:

LGBTIQA+	Disability	Multicultural	Intersectional	Equity	First Nations	Older Adults
25	52	22	50	22	4	20

Inclusive Banyule represents Banyule City Council's evolution toward an integrated and equity-focused approach to inclusion. Building on a decade of work under the Inclusion, Access and Equity Framework and population-specific plans, Council adopted an intersectional model in 2022 to address overlapping barriers faced by diverse communities. Over four years, Inclusive Banyule delivered strategic actions across all departments, embedding inclusive practices into policies, programs, and services. Key achievements include capacity-building initiatives, system-level audits, and projects improving accessibility and participation. This approach has strengthened Council's role as a leader in fairness and inclusion, ensuring services are responsive, equitable, and aligned with community needs and legislative requirements.

Addressing Perceptions and Attitudes

Inclusive Banyule worked to shift attitudes through education, visibility, and lived experience, fostering empathy and reducing barriers. Over Years 1–3, Council developed intersectional resources, delivered capacity building sessions, and partnered on projects to embed inclusion in planning. While initiatives were well received, impact measurement was limited. Year 4 will focus on embedding resources and strengthening partnerships to make inclusion a core part of Council culture.

Elevating Visibility and Awareness of Diversity

Inclusive Banyule increased visibility of diverse communities through events, campaigns, intersectional resources, normalising difference and fostering belonging. Actions included days of significant calendar, inclusive celebrations, and partnerships to embed diversity in communications and engagement strategies. Initiatives such as MidSumma, IDAHOBIT, Harmony Day and International Day of People with Disability showcased lived experiences and strengthened community connections. Year 4 will focus on sustainable engagement through a Community Engagement Toolkit and continued partnerships to ensure diversity remains visible and valued.

Identifying and Addressing Systemic Barriers

Inclusive Banyule focused on tackling root causes of inequity by embedding inclusion into policies, processes, and infrastructure. Actions included audits of public spaces, undertaking Gender Impact Assessments application of Universal Design principles and incorporating lived experience into planning. These efforts influenced projects such as all-gender public toilets, safer parking policies, and inclusive design features in the new Rosanna Library. Year 4 will prioritise implementing audit recommendations and strengthening intersectional approaches to ensure sustainable, system-level change.

Understanding the Lived Experience of People

Inclusive Banyule embedded community voices into planning and decision-making to ensure services reflect real needs. Actions included co-designing projects, engaging Population Advisory Committees, and amplifying lived experience through consultations and events. Initiatives such as the disability webpage, Golden Rainbow group, and SALDIG youth project delivered tangible outcomes and built trust. Year 4 will continue strengthening partnerships and creative engagement to ensure inclusion is shaped by those most impacted.

Learnings and challenges

Inclusive Banyule has driven cultural and systemic change through strong partnerships, leadership champions, and embedding inclusion into policies and practices. Lived experience and capacity building have been invaluable, fostering collaboration and breaking down silos. However, challenges remain, including low engagement with resources, resourcing challenges and the need for clearer implementation strategies. Sustaining systemic change while balancing immediate needs, strengthening external partnerships and responding to broader social pressures such as cost-of-living will be critical moving forward.

Conclusion

Inclusive Banyule should remain a core Council initiative, as it has successfully embedded inclusion across the organisation and strengthened collaboration, systemic change and community engagement. The next plan must build on this momentum by deepening intersectional approaches, leveraging partnerships, and driving sustainable inclusion. Maintaining an intersectional lens is critical to addressing overlapping identities and complex barriers, ensuring policies and services deliver fair, meaningful outcomes for all community members.

Background

Banyule Council is dedicated to making our community welcoming, fair, and inclusive for everyone. Adopted in September 2022, Inclusive Banyule 2022-2026 is a strategic plan aimed at fostering intentional inclusive practices through an intersectional, equity-focused approach. The Plan's actions focus on:

- Addressing perceptions and attitudes
- Elevating visibility and awareness of diversity
- Identifying and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion
- Understanding the lived experience of people.

Inclusive Banyule was developed as an integrated and strategic model of inclusion and had an intersectional, equity focused approach to informing Council's work. The introduction of Inclusive Banyule reduced the number of previous plans/frameworks from five to two, with Council's population focused, inclusion work embedded within Inclusive Banyule and Council's Self-Determination Strategy guiding work with local Aboriginal communities towards Reconciliation within the Marrageil Strategy.

Inclusive Banyule

Inclusive Banyule outlined that Council's approach to uplifting inclusion and was underpinned by:

Learning and Adapt

- Pillars of social justice (access, equity, participation and rights) embedded into daily work
- Understanding lived experience, needs and aspirations
- Elevating visibility and awareness of diversity
- Addressing perceptions and attitudes that reinforce inequities
- Adapting social infrastructure, public places and spaces to be fit for people
- Adapting communications and engagement practices to reduce barriers to inclusion

Partnership and collaboration

- Focusing efforts on creating synergies and finding new ways to work together
- Working with organisations that are present, relevant and engaged to deliver better outcomes
- Creating connections between people, organisations, services, places, environments and ecosystems
- Advocating to address issues and barriers
- Supporting communities and groups to equitably access opportunities and resources

Focus

- Addressing issues important to our community
- Supporting identified communities that experience structural disadvantage
- Identifying and addressing systemic barriers that reinforce inequities
- Delivering initiatives that accelerate measurable outcomes

Over the four years of the plan, Council set out three objectives:

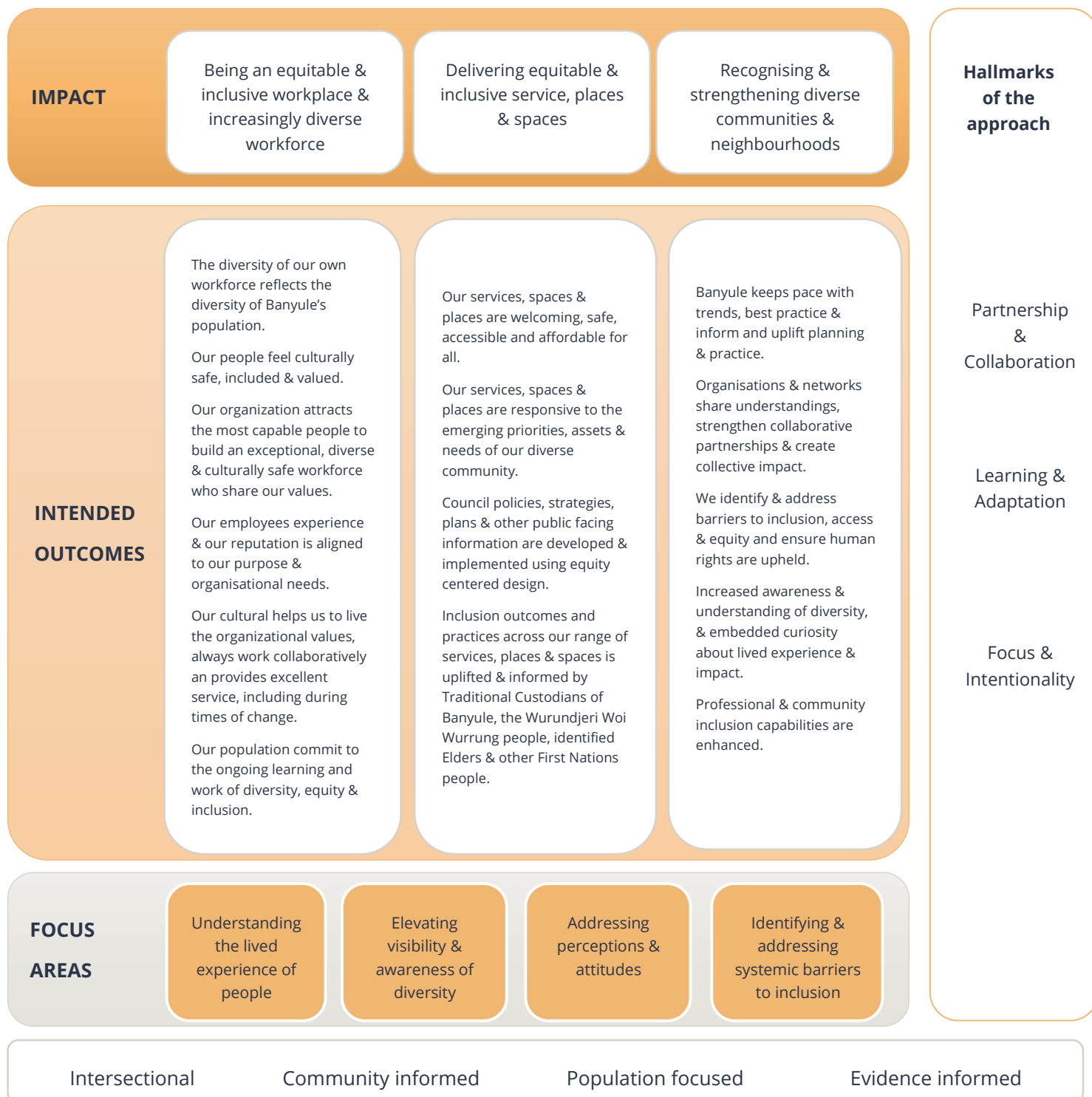
1. Being an equitable and inclusive workplace and increasingly diverse workforce
2. Delivering equitable and inclusive service, places and spaces
3. Recognising and strengthening diverse communities and neighbourhoods

Evaluation purpose

To assess the collective impact of Inclusive Banyule over four years, focusing on strategic, system-level changes and implementation processes. Findings will inform the development of the next iteration of Inclusive Banyule.

Theory of change

Inclusive Banyule guided the ways that Council worked to promote and foster diversity and inclusion across the organisation and the municipality. The theory of change developed for this plan identified that to reach the objectives, efforts needed focus on four key areas and actions under these key areas needed to be planned with elements of the three hallmarks.



Assumptions at planning of Inclusive Banyule

- Inclusive Banyule believed there was an interest, appetite and readiness for change both at a community and organisational level.
- Inclusive Banyule believed that sufficient resources had been allocated and there was a leadership commitment to embedding and uplifting inclusion.
- Inclusive Banyule believed an integrated and intersectional approach to inclusion would have the best outcomes for the community.
- Inclusive Banyule identified a sector trend towards integrated diversity and inclusion plans.
- Capacity to expand our focus to all priority groups.

Predicted external factors considered at the time of planning Inclusive Banyule

- Changes to the broader political and social climate during the timeframe of the plan.
- Influence of media narratives and public discourse around inclusion and key population groups targeted in the plan.
- The impacts COVID19 had on the community.

Summary of Achievements

Each year of Inclusive Banyule, an Achievements Report was produced to summarise progress on each action. In addition, case studies for key projects were included. These reports can be found [here](#).

Inclusive Banyule overview

Over the four-years of the plan, Inclusive Banyule will deliver 195 actions.

The delivery of the Inclusive Banyule actions sat across multiple Council directorates and teams. The decentralisation of actions demonstrates that to uplift inclusion, it is the responsibility of all teams across Council.

Year 1		Year 2		Year 3		Year 4	
# actions	% completed	# actions	% Completed	# actions	% Completed	# actions	% Completed
26	81%	70	94%	47	94%	52	TBC

The following table provides a breakdown of the distribution of action across different population groups. The intersectional category includes actions which uplift inclusion across multiple population groups and community.

	LGBTIQA+	Disability	Multicultural	Intersectional	Equity	First Nations	Older Adults
Year 1	2	8	1	14	1	0	0
Year 2	11	17	11	8	12	2	9
Year 3	7	10	5	11	6	2	6
Year 4	5	17	5	17	3	0	5
Total	25	52	22	50	22	4	20

The evolution of Inclusive Banyule

Banyule City Council has a long-standing commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, recognising these values as essential to building a healthy, connected, and resilient community. Over the years, the Council has taken a proactive approach to embedding inclusive practices across its policies, programs, services, and organisational culture.

In 2014, Council endorsed the Inclusion, Access and Equity Framework which provided an overarching commitment to access, equity and inclusion. To support this approach, Council endorsed four-year population level plans focusing on People with Disability, Multicultural Communities, LGBTIQ+ and First Nations communities. Each of these plans were developed in collaboration with its corresponding Advisory Committee. This approach to inclusion ensured Council remained aligned with state and federal legislation, such as the Equal Opportunity Act and the Disability Discrimination Act. Furthermore, the Banyule Plan 2020-2024 had integrated the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan which demonstrated the organisations appetite for integrated approaches to planning, implementation and evaluation.

In 2022, Council moved towards an integrated and strategic model of inclusion, which applied an intersectional, equity focused approach to informing Council's work. Inclusive Banyule was Council's first endeavour at an intersectional plan and proceeded with this approach as a trial and an understanding that the outcomes would determine ongoing approaches. Throughout the plan, Inclusive Banyule sought to seek clarity and identify projects for the shared purpose of creating a more inclusive Banyule.

An intersectional approach to inclusion ensured that Banyule addressed the complex and overlapping barriers faced by community members. In adopting an intersectional lens, Council acknowledged that barriers to participation and access are not experienced equally, and are often compounded for people who belong to more than one marginalised group. By considering factors such as race, gender, disability, age, and socioeconomic status together, policies and programs become more responsive and equitable. This approach avoids one-size-fits-all solutions, improves service delivery, and builds trust by acknowledging the diverse realities of residents. Ultimately, intersectionality leads to more effective outcomes and strengthens the legitimacy of local government as a champion for fairness and inclusion.

Year 1

The Inclusive Banyule Year 1 action plan aimed to set the scene for community inclusion at Banyule. Year 1 had a strong focus on intersectional projects which aimed to build staff capacity to uplift their community inclusion practices, the development of resources and the consolidation of data and social research reports across population groups. Year 1 had a large focus on disability focused projects through the establishment of the Disability Website project and the receipt of a grant to establish the Inclusion@Sport project.

Year 2

The Inclusive Banyule Year 2 Action Plan was the most extensive of the four-year strategies and comprised of 25 actions delivered by multiple Council teams. While Community Wellbeing led the majority of these actions, the plan intentionally worked to strengthen Banyule's integrated approach to inclusion by engaging other departments in the delivery. This approach reinforced that inclusion is a shared responsibility across the organisation.

Year 2 actions were categorized into the population groups (LGBTIQ+, multicultural and disability) and focus areas including mental health and gender equity for the first time. This action plan continued to have a strong focus on disability as a result of the funding allocation for the disability website and outcomes of GIAs which enabled teams to have more conversations about inclusion from a compliance perspective.

Year 3

The Inclusive Banyule Year 3 Action Plan streamlined the number of actions to ensure the plan remained achievable, while still being ambitious with 47 actions. Building on the structure of Year 2, actions continued to be arranged across population groups, reinforcing a targeted and inclusive approach. Year 3 placed a stronger emphasis on system-level change, with many actions focused on auditing Council spaces and services to identify opportunities for improvement and strengthen inclusion across the organisation. The development of these actions was guided by insights from Banyule's Population Committees and informed by evidence from research papers, ensuring that strategies were both community-driven and grounded in best practice.

Year 4

The Inclusive Banyule Year 4 Action Plan was developed in alignment with the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing priorities, bringing a stronger strategic focus to inclusion. The action plan concentrated on completing key projects while laying the groundwork for the next iteration of Inclusive Banyule. Actions were grouped under clear themes: communication, engagement and honouring lived experiences; inclusive community buildings and spaces; inclusive programs, events and services; and partnerships. Each focus area was introduced with impact statements and key statistics, providing a clear rationale for the related actions. To strengthen accountability and clarity, every action was linked to a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing priority, a Council plan or strategy, and a population group focus, and included details of the project lead and support teams.

Inclusive Banyule Focus Area Outcomes

Addressing perceptions and attitudes

System level outcome

Addressing perceptions and attitudes improves inclusion by breaking down barriers caused by stereotypes, fostering empathy, and creating environments where everyone feels respected and valued. This leads to more diverse thinking, greater individual confidence, more positive social interactions and a sense of belonging for all. Research has found that to make changes to attitudes and perceptions; interventions need to be based on information and education. For sustained impacts through inclusive practice, actions needed to be deliberate, multi-layered and combine education, visibility, and lived experience.

Key focuses

To address perceptions and attitudes, Years 1-3 of Inclusive Banyule focused on the development and sharing of inclusion resources and information for both Council staff and the community. These collective actions aimed to provide staff and community with greater awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion, build empathy, dispel misinformation, understand the rationale for change and how an inclusion lens can be applied to Council work. This approach enabled Council teams who have not traditionally considered the intersectional needs of the community, to reflect on inclusion through their planning and development. Inclusive Banyule has provided opportunities conversations and capacity building that outlines that inclusion practice is something that progresses with time and that perfection does not need to be achieved before starting to make changes.

What was undertaken

Across Years 1 to 3, multiple actions focused on building awareness and understanding of diversity and inclusion, strengthening skills and capabilities, introducing the concept of intersectionality, and identifying barriers to inclusion. These collective efforts aimed to provide evidence-based, practical resources and information for staff and the community to adapt planning, delivery, and implementation. At the time of

development, most publicly available resources focused on single population groups and lacked an intersectional lens. To address this gap, Banyule's resources were intentionally designed to be intersectional, ensuring that the diverse needs and experiences of the community were reflected and supported

Inclusive Banyule has significantly increased organisational awareness of inclusion and strengthened the application of an inclusive lens across Council's work. A clear example of this impact is embedding inclusion within the Public Realm Framework. This framework sets the foundations for Banyule's public spaces and ensures that planning and development consider the diverse needs of the community. Throughout its development, data, research and lived experiences were used to identify barriers and understand who in the community is disproportionately impacted, resulting in a framework that prioritises people in design. This partnership also extended to advocating for better outcomes in public spaces as part of the North East Link project, and informed considerations for access and inclusion in new play spaces and the design and provision of public toilets. In Year 4, Inclusive Banyule continues to create positive impacts by supporting innovative community engagement in the design and development of new spaces and facilities. These adaptations ensure Council's places are fit for people, place, and purpose.

Inclusive Banyule created valuable opportunities for Council staff, community members, and stakeholders to come together to learn and share ideas about diversity and inclusion. Information sessions held during Years 1 and 3 covered topics such as running inclusive events, disability in sport, using Census data, understanding racism, and becoming an active bystander. These sessions showcased inclusive practice, elevated the visibility of Banyule's diverse community, and incorporated lived experiences to deepen understanding. While feedback was overwhelmingly positive, the sessions were resource-intensive, and some attracted lower-than-expected attendance. As a result, the approach to sharing information and building community capability for inclusion was reconsidered to ensure greater reach and sustainability

Throughout Years 1 to 3, efforts focused on refining resources, data, and information to make them more accessible for staff and to identify ways to embed inclusion adaptations into everyday practice. While these resources were high-quality and evidence-based, uptake could have been strengthened through a more strategic implementation process and clearer opportunities for integration into workflows. Year 4 will prioritise strategies to embed existing resources and foster partnerships with Council teams committed to advancing their inclusion journey. These partnerships and resources are critical to addressing perceptions and attitudes about barriers faced by communities and ensuring inclusion becomes a core part of Council's culture.

Overall, the resources, information and partnership work were well received by across Council and community members, they fulfilled a need for individualised support, centralised information and opportunities for further details, tips and suggestions. The use of the resources and information and adapted practice was unable to be tracked. Baseline data around current inclusive practices, awareness, attitudes and staff confidence was not collected. Therefore, it is difficult to measure the collective impact of this focus area. It is understood that the actions under the addressing perceptions and attitudes focus area have contributed to Objective 1, our people commit to the ongoing learning and work of diversity, equity and inclusion and continue to:

- provide a resources and partnership opportunity to build awareness and understanding around diversity and inclusion
- provide practical tools
- support for staff to make changes in their behaviour and practice
- act as a go-to resource beyond the lifetime of Inclusive Banyule.

Elevating visibility and awareness of diversity

System level outcomes

Elevating the visibility and awareness of diversity is a powerful lever for inclusion. It normalises difference, challenges stereotypes, and fosters empathy. When diverse identities, cultures, and experiences are made visible through storytelling, events, campaigns, and representation, they become part of the shared community narrative. For Council, showcasing the diversity of our community signals belonging and respect, creating safer and more welcoming environments where everyone feels seen, valued, and included.

Key focus

Inclusive Banyule implemented a range of actions aimed at elevating the visibility and awareness of Banyule's diverse community. These actions had both organisational and community-focused objectives, seeking to build recognition and respect, create opportunities for learning about different communities, deepen understanding of inclusion, belonging, and strengthen Council's relationships with the community. Through these initiatives, Inclusive Banyule worked to foster a culture where diversity is celebrated, and inclusion is embedded in everyday practice.

What was undertaken

Under each population group, a calendar of significant days was established to guide acknowledgements and celebrations. The calendar, along with factsheets and associated events, provided important educational opportunities and created spaces for the community to gather, connect and reflect. Council demonstrated a strong commitment to learning about population groups and listening to their experiences to support more inclusive planning and delivery. Each action helped raise awareness and visibility of Banyule's diverse community and reinforced Council's commitment to celebrating diversity. While minimal evaluation data was collected, limiting the ability to articulate collective impact, key learnings from this three-year period highlighted the importance of partnerships with community and internal and external stakeholders. In response, the new plan will place greater emphasis on systematic data collection and evaluation to enable a clearer articulation of collective impact and inform continuous improvement. The Banyule community continues to advocate for greater visibility beyond days of significance and seeks representation in areas such as Council communications. Lived experience informed the development of the Communications Strategy, leading to proactive actions for inclusive communication. In addition, Year 4 will focus on engagement for all people through the development of a Community Engagement Toolkit, supported by the new Connected Communities Advisory Committee.

During Years 1 to 3, key actions to elevate visibility and awareness were planned for each population group. Examples include MidSumma and IDAHOBIT events for the LGBTIQ+ community, International Day of People with Disability events and updates to Council's disability web pages for the disability community, and participation in research to better understand barriers and experiences of racism in Banyule alongside Harmony Day celebrations for the multicultural community. Each of these initiatives incorporated lived experience into planning and delivery, ensuring authenticity and meaningful engagement.

Throughout Years 1 to 3, two key projects focused on creating long-term, sustainable changes in how sporting clubs run programs, welcome new members, and foster safe, inclusive environments. These projects targeted people with disabilities and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, addressing both physical and psychosocial accessibility to encourage and welcome a more diverse membership. An evaluation of the Proud 2 Play Rainbow Ready sports program will be available at the end of Year 4, providing insights into the impact and effectiveness of this initiative.

Through Council's Diversity and Inclusion Plan and Our People Strategy, actions have focused on building staff capability and understanding of diversity in the workplace. This commitment has resulted in expanded training opportunities for staff, the collection of demographic data to inform decision-making, and the implementation of programs such as the Inclusive Employment initiative and the First Nations Traineeship. These programs demonstrate Council's ongoing dedication to fostering a culture of inclusion and creating a workplace where diversity is valued and supported.

Overall, the actions within the elevating visibility and awareness of diversity focus area were positively received by Council teams and community members. Inclusive Banyule recognises that actions in this focus area need to be ongoing. Inclusion is as a journey, not a destination. The actions have contributed to Objective 1, our people commit to the ongoing learning and work of diversity, equity and inclusion and Objective 3, recognising and strengthening diverse communities and neighbourhoods and continue to:

- Builds cultural competence for staff
- Creates a shared commitment to inclusion in our community
- Fosters belonging and trust among members of the community
- Encourage and enable participation in Council programs, services and events
- Challenges stereotypes that negatively impact our community.

Identifying and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion

System level outcomes

Identifying and addressing systemic barriers is essential for creating lasting and meaningful inclusion. A focus on systemic barriers tackles the root causes of inequity rather than surface-level symptoms. Barriers such as inaccessible infrastructure, biased policies, and exclusionary practices often operate invisibly and disproportionately impact marginalised communities. By actively uncovering and addressing these barriers, systems can be redesigned to be more equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all people.

Key focus

Inclusive Banyule implemented a range of actions aimed at identifying and addressing systemic barriers to inclusion. Over the three-year period, the initiative increasingly prioritised system-level and structural changes to tackle the root causes of inequity. This focus ensured that change is sustainable and embedded within Council's policies, processes, and physical environments. Key strategies included auditing public buildings to identify areas to improve accessibility, an inclusion lens applied to policies, frameworks and plans and partnering with Council teams to deliver inclusion actions. By addressing systemic barriers, Inclusive Banyule is creating a foundation for long-term equity and inclusion across the municipality.

What was undertaken

Years 2 and 3 placed a strong emphasis on identifying barriers and conducting audits, with plans to address these barriers in Year 4. Frameworks such as Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) and Universal Design principles are being embedded into Council's work, creating opportunities to consider how new programs and policies affect different members of the community. The GIA process enables teams to identify potential impacts and barriers during planning phases, helping to uncover gendered needs, improve service design, and reduce inequalities—ultimately leading to better outcomes for the community.

Examples where GIAs have influenced design include the Public Toilet Plan, which resulted in the implementation of all-gender public toilets and recommendations for future facility use and needs; the Parking

Permit Policy, which addressed unintended consequences and women's experiences of exclusion from safe and equitable parking, leading to new considerations for safety and access across life stages; and the Rosanna Library project, which identified the need for dedicated prayer spaces now included in the design. While the GIA process has evolved with practice, there remains a need to embed a stronger intersectional lens and deepen understanding in future applications to ensure inclusion for all community members.

The focus on Universal Design principles and audits of Council spaces has been critical to ensuring equitable opportunities for all. During Years 1 to 3, actions centred on assessing Council's physical infrastructure and identifying opportunities to improve accessibility. Year 4 will shift towards implementing audit recommendations, upgrading existing facilities, and shaping new infrastructure to be fit for people and fit for purpose. This approach ensures that inclusion is embedded in the design and delivery of public spaces, creating environments that are welcoming and accessible for everyone.

Inviting and embedding lived experience to inform both physical and cultural accessibility in Council's places and spaces was a key focus during Years 1 to 3. This approach provided valuable insights into how different community members engage with and use Council facilities, helping to identify barriers and opportunities for improvement. In Year 4, this commitment continues through the Connected Communities Advisory Committee project, which aims to demonstrate how lived experience can shape inclusive design and planning. This work will also inform strategies to strengthen social connection and create a greater sense of belonging, ensuring that Council spaces are welcoming and responsive to the needs of all community members

Internally, Council has worked to remove barriers to employment through initiatives aimed at addressing inequalities in access for local people experiencing disadvantage. Projects such as the Inclusive Employment Program and First Nations Traineeships demonstrate this commitment. In addition, internal training opportunities on disability in the workplace, diversity and inclusion, and the celebration of days of significance such as IDAHOBIT have created spaces for learning, challenging bias, and shifting attitudes and perceptions. Collectively, these actions contribute to building a safer, more welcoming, and diverse workforce where inclusion is embedded in everyday practice.

Overall, the outcomes of the identifying and addressing systemic barriers focus area have matured significantly over time. This priority has created opportunities to highlight systemic barriers that often operate invisibly and disproportionately impact marginalised communities. This approach ensures that inclusion is not just a short-term initiative but a sustainable, structural shift that improves equity and accessibility across all aspects of Council's work. The focus area has contributed Objective 1, the diversity of our own workforce reflects the diversity of Banyule's population, and our people feel culturally safe, included and valued and to Objective 2, services, spaces and places are welcoming, safe and accessible and affordable. The focus area continues efforts to:

- Remove structural obstacles
- Creates sustainable change
- Builds equity, not just equality
- Improve community trust in Council
- Empowers staff and community

Understanding the lived experience of people

System level outcomes

Understanding the lived experience of people is fundamental to creating inclusive systems and services that truly meet community needs. When individuals share their stories, challenges, and insights, they reveal the real-world impacts of exclusion and highlight opportunities for meaningful change. For Council staff, hearing from people with lived experience builds empathy, informs better decision-making, and ensures policies and programs are grounded in reality, rather than assumptions. For the community, it empowers people to be active participants in shaping their environment, fostering trust and a sense of belonging. Inclusion becomes more than a principle, it becomes a practice shaped by those who experience it most directly, ensuring that solutions are authentic, relevant, and impactful.

Key focus

The understanding lived experience focus area identified a wide range of actions which embedded the voices and experiences of community members into Council's planning and decision-making. Lived experience was a priority and created opportunities for Council to engage directly with community collaboratively, ensuring services and initiatives reflect real community needs. This approach has strengthened inclusivity, improved outcomes, and established a foundation for ongoing consultation and partnership between Council and the community.

What was undertaken

During Years 1 and 3, projects were co-designed with the community to ensure their needs and perspectives were reflected. The Population Advisory Committees provided a formal structure for community members to give feedback directly to Council and make recommendations. Across these years, the committees advised on submissions to the Australian Bureau of Statistics supporting the adoption of the ABS 2020 Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables. They also highlighted the need to investigate wheelchair accessibility on footpaths in Greensborough. Beginning in Year 3, committee members were invited to participate in consultation opportunities, offering feedback on a range of plans and policies.

Embedding the voices of people with lived experience has been key to the success of projects such as Council's disability webpage, the Golden Rainbow social group, and events like MidSumma. Community members participated in reference groups to co-design approaches that better meet local needs. This collaborative model delivered tangible positive outcomes, including increased use of disability information on Council's website and higher attendance at MidSumma events. When data gaps were identified, Inclusive Banyule engaged in research projects to hear directly from the community and inform future work. The program continues to create opportunities to share insights from lived experience, ensuring they shape planning across Council. There is an ongoing commitment to amplifying community voices, finding creative ways to involve them in consultations, and building partnerships between Council and the community.

The SALDIG project, was developed to address growing concerns about youth disengagement and the lack of tailored support for Banyule's Somali-Australian community. Recognizing the importance of cultural relevance, the project was co-designed with community members, ensuring that the solutions reflected their lived experiences and priorities. This collaborative approach resulted in an innovative and inclusive program that provided practical support, strengthened community connections, and created pathways for young people to engage positively with services and opportunities. The program was successful as it was designed by the community, for the community and delivered strategies that were effective and embraced.

The focus on understanding the lived experiences of people has continued to evolve and become more deeply embedded across Council during Years 1 to 3. This approach created meaningful opportunities to hear directly from the community, ensuring that programs and initiatives are better aligned with their needs and priorities. By integrating these insights into planning and decision-making, Council is building a stronger foundation for inclusive and responsive services. This focus area has contributed Objective 2, our services, spaces and places are welcoming, safe and accessible and affordable, our services, spaces and places are responsive to the emerging priorities, assess and needs of our diverse communities, Council policies, strategies and plan are developed and implemented using equity centred design, and Objective 3, we identify and address barriers to inclusion, access, equity and ensure human rights are upheld. The focus area continues efforts to:

- Deepens empathy and awareness of the community
- Improves Council's decision making and planning
- Supports cultural change
- Create greater trust and transparency
- Empower marginalized voices

Reflection - learnings and challenges

Reflective practice has been central to the development of each action plan for Inclusive Banyule. Undertaking this process has allowed the team to reflect on the learnings and challenges experienced over the past three years. This process helped identify what worked well, where gaps remain, and how these insights can shape more effective and inclusive approaches moving forward.

Learnings

Partnership and collaboration

Strong partnerships across Council have driven better outcomes. Inclusion is now seen as everyone's responsibility, with collective action replacing siloed approaches.

Leadership and champions

Identifying and enlisting champions within Council has been critical to driving engagement and embedding inclusive practices.

Embedding inclusion in systems

Inclusion requires systemic change, not just programs. Resources need to be packaged and supported by systems to ensure they are embedded effectively.

Valuing lived experience

The voices of people with lived experience have been seen as invaluable. The challenge has been transforming these insights into practical actions across Council.

Capacity building and knowledge growth

Capacity building and research remain essential. Our knowledge base has grown significantly, and other teams are now engaged and leading work.

Language and cultural shift

The use of inclusive language has increased across Council, reflecting a broader cultural shift toward inclusion.

Breaking down silos

Inclusion previously felt siloed, but Inclusive Banyule has started to break this down, fostering collective responsibility and collaboration.

Intersectionality and resource gaps

Intersectional resources are limited and often focused on disability, highlighting the need for broader, more inclusive tools.

Sustainability and accountability

Work continues even when specific projects end, supported by accountability across Council and ongoing commitment to inclusion.

Challenges

Limited engagement with resources

Council staff engagement with inclusion resources was lower than anticipated, therefore identification of ways to integrate this information will be explored.

Shifting away from traditional approaches

A cultural shift has been required to allow Inclusive Banyule to move away from old ways of working with limited impact such as running events. This has required time to shift perspectives and community acceptance of new priorities and investments.

System-level understanding

Building understanding of systemic change, rather than just delivering programs, and balancing immediate community needs with long-term inclusion strategies remains challenging.

External partnerships and influence

Strengthening external partnerships and influencing other organisations to do more in the inclusion space is an ongoing need.

Global and social context

Broader challenges such as cost-of-living pressures, mental health concerns, and a declining sense of belonging have influenced engagement and priorities.

The following summary highlights the aspects of Inclusive Banyule the organisation is most proud of:

- Developing and delivering a comprehensive inclusion plan that has evolved over four years, with most actions achieved through strong partnerships across Council. Inclusion has shifted from being the responsibility of one team to becoming embedded across multiple teams.
- Initiating bold conversations about integration and seeing those ideas come to life. The organisation was willing to take risks, trial new approaches, and think outside the box to achieve better outcomes.
- Taking important steps toward intersectionality by integrating considerations that reflect the diverse experiences of people, including initiatives like community advisory groups and champion networks which are laying the foundation for future progress.
- Maintaining a clear strategic focus throughout the evolution of the plan, ensuring that inclusion work remains aligned with long-term goals and meaningful change.

Strengths and opportunities

A review of the objectives to determine the strengths of the work that has been achieved over four years and identify opportunities for work to continue. Recognising the inclusion is a journey.

Objective 1: Being an equitable and inclusive workplace and increasingly diverse workforce

Strengths	Opportunities
• Our People Strategy • Workplace Sexual Harassment Prevention Action Plan	Further grow opportunities to embed inclusion across Council, build the capacity of staff and achieve better outcomes for staff and the community.

- Diversity and Inclusion Plan
- Workplace Gender Equality Plan
- Data on diversity markers recorded in Aspire

Objective 2: Delivering equitable and inclusive service, places and spaces

Strengths	Opportunities
• Development and ongoing partnerships to ensure that inclusion work is the responsibility of every person in Council. • Baseline data to understanding the physical needs of Council spaces to make them more accessible. • Creating opportunity to learn from people with lived experience to improve the delivery of services, places and spaces.	Focus on systems level change opportunities which build on Inclusive Banyule to create a more welcoming, safe and inclusive community such as considering the voices, needs and integrating visibility and acknowledgement of diverse communities in the planning of services, places and spaces.

Objectives 3: Recognising and strengthening diverse communities and neighbourhoods

Strengths	Opportunities
• Creating innovative ways to implement committees through the establishment of Connected Communities Advisory Community. • Champions Groups provide community with informal opportunities to discuss topics impacting them and their communities. • Research, data and collation of lived experience shared with teams across Council to ensure more inclusive outcomes.	To continue providing new and innovative ways for community to provide feedback to Council.

Recommendations

Inclusive Banyule should continue as a key Council initiative, as its outcomes have proven successful and have matured significantly over time. The program has shifted inclusion to be embedded across Council, fostering collaboration, systemic change, and stronger community engagement. Building on this momentum, the next plan should leverage these achievements to deepen intersectional approaches, strengthen partnerships, and drive sustainable inclusion across all areas of Council. The new plan should continue its focus to creating inclusive neighbourhoods, places and spaces and inclusive services and programs as more opportunities continue to be identified through engagement with Banyule's diverse community.

Continuing an intersectional approach for this plan is essential because it ensures that inclusion addresses the diverse and overlapping identities within our community. This approach helps Council design policies, programs and services that respond to real, complex experiences rather than one-dimensional needs which reduce gaps and inequities. By continuing an intersectionality approach to future inclusion plans, Council can create more effective, fair, and meaningful outcomes that truly uplift all members of the community.